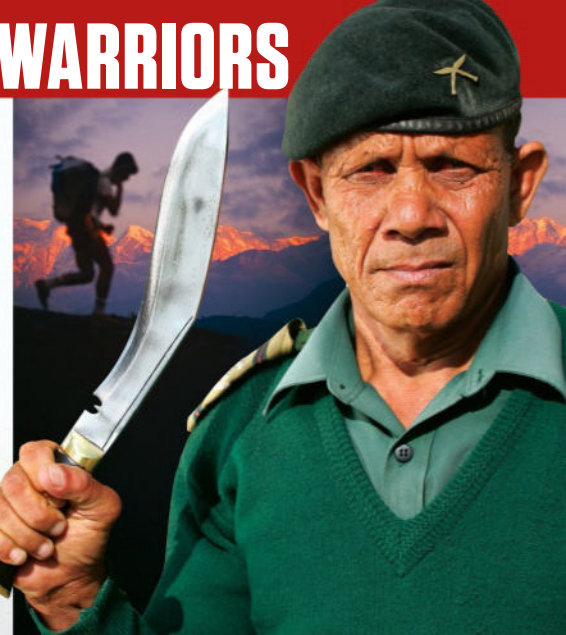


**GURKHAS** ORIGINS OF NEPAL'S TOUGHEST WARRIORS

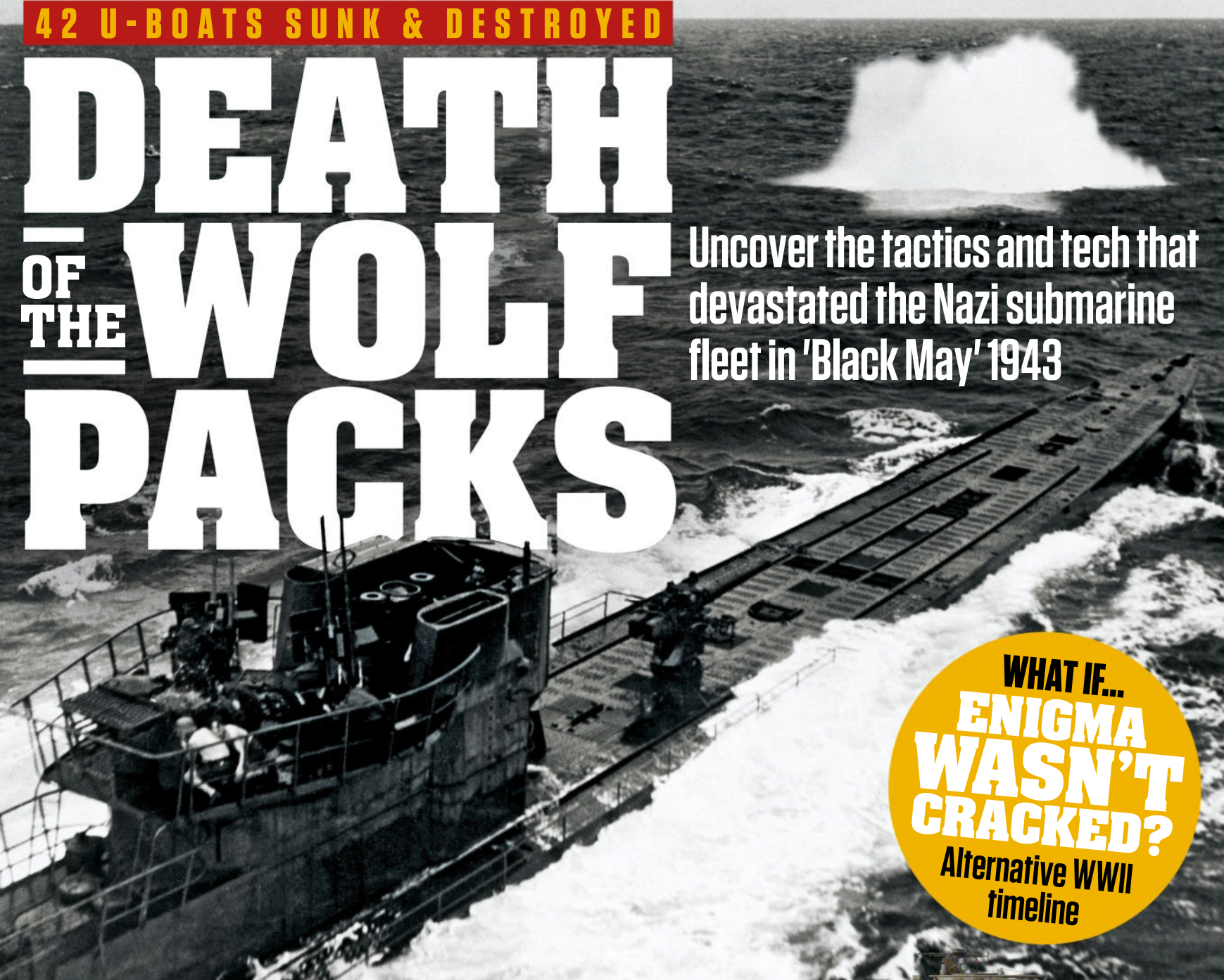
# HISTORY *of* WAR



**42 U-BOATS SUNK & DESTROYED**

# DEATH OF THE WOLF PACKS

Uncover the tactics and tech that devastated the Nazi submarine fleet in 'Black May' 1943



**WHAT IF...  
ENIGMA  
WASN'T  
CRACKED?**  
Alternative WWII  
timeline

**NIVELLE, 1917**

Inside the failed offensive that broke French morale



**VICKERS T-26**

The British design on the Red Army's frontline








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*Above: Crewmen on a US Coast Guard vessel observe depth charges detonating during the Battle of the Atlantic*

## CONTRIBUTORS



### MARK GALEOTTI

Mark is honorary professor at UCL's School of Slavonic and East European Studies, and an expert on Russian history. On page 68 he discusses how Putin's past wartime victories poorly informed his strategy in Ukraine – the subject of his latest book *Putin's Wars*, available now in paperback.



### SIR DERMOT TURING

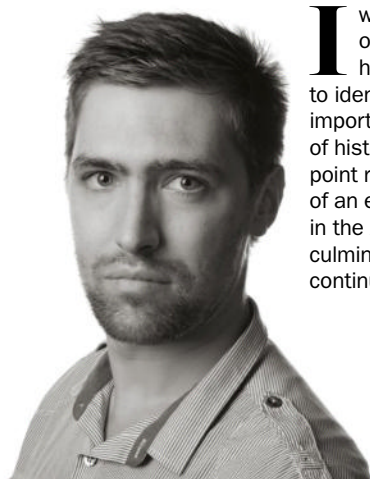
As well as a writer and speaker, Dermot is also the author of multiple books on the history of codebreaking, including a biography of his uncle, Alan Turing. Over on page 34 he discusses the possible outcomes if the Enigma code had not been broken by the Allies.



### LOUIS HARDIMAN

The Nivelle Offensive, in the spring of 1917, was expected to punch a gaping hole in the German frontline, decisively pushing the enemy away from the French capital. Starting on page 40, Louis recounts how Erich Ludendorff's new defence in depth tactic was so devastating for the French attack.

# Welcome



I write this on the eve of the two-year anniversary of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. In that time, several key moments, or string of events, have captured the attention of analysts and observers as they seek to identify a turning point or momentum shift in the conflict. Of course, the importance of these events may only be fully understood with the long view of historians in the years to come. This issue explores one such turning point relating to the Second World War, which took place over the course of an entire month. May 1943 saw over 40 U-boats sunk or incapacitated in the Atlantic, most with the loss of their entire crew. This was the culmination of months spent developing tactics and technology, which continued to have a far-reaching impact on the course of the war.

*Tim*

**Tim Williamson**  
Editor-in-Chief

## TENTH ANNIVERSARY

This month marks ten years since *History of War* was launched in the spring of 2014. Turn to the back page to reminisce with our very first cover!







# DEATH OF THE WOLF PACKS

**24** Blow-by-blow account of Black May 1943:  
the month that saw Dönitz's U-boat fleet crippled

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for incredible  
subscription offers





# FRONTLINE

## GURKHAS

### 12 **TIMELINE**

From imperial adversaries to the crown's finest, how Nepal's warriors became known around the world

### 16 **'A GALLANT ADVERSARY'**

In war against the expansive East India Company, the defeated Gorkha Kingdom earned its enemy's respect

### 18 **A KNIFE TO A GUNFIGHT**

From the Dardanelles to the Western Front, the Gurkhas excelled in the combat of the First World War

### 20 **ON MANY FRONTS**

During the Second World War, Gurkha units served in African deserts, Burmese jungles and Italian mountains

### 22 **THE OLD FRONTIER**

One of the Gurkhas' most recent major deployments saw a return to a familiar battlefield



60



12

### 06 **WAR IN FOCUS**

Stunning imagery from throughout history

### 24 **DEATH OF THE WOLF PACKS**

In May 1943, Nazi Germany's U-boat fleet was crippled by superior Allied tactics and tech

### 34 **WHAT IF THE ALLIES HADN'T CRACKED THE ENIGMA CODE?**

Two eminent historians weigh in on this alternative Second World War timeline

### GREAT BATTLES

### 40 **NIVELLE OFFENSIVE, 1917**

The planned French masterstroke that German defenders turned into a massacre

### MEDAL OF HONOR HERO

### 50 **CARL L SITTER**

This US Marine fought hand-to-hand combat to save his men from certain death

### 54 **KOREA: CRUCIBLE OF WAR**

Read how the Korean War saw a critical watershed in military tactics and technology

### OPERATOR'S HANDBOOK

### 60 **SOVIET T-26**

This British designed light tank was one of the Soviet Union's most numerous early models



34



54

## 67 **HOMEFONT**

### 68 **FALSE AUGURIES**

How Putin misunderstood his past victories

### 72 **MUSEUMS AND EVENTS**

A roundup of activities and exhibitions

### 74 **WWII THIS MONTH**

Key Second World War events in photos,

### 76 **REVIEWS**

The latest military history books

### 82 **ARTEFACT OF WAR**

A Crimean War Victoria Cross





## **WAR**<sub>in</sub> **FOCUS** EASTER GIFTS

24 April 1916

Italian artillery gunners in the Alps load shells inscribed 'Buona Pasqua' ('Happy Easter') into a howitzer aimed at Austrian defences during a two-month stalemate. The deadlock began with the inconclusive Fifth Battle of Isonzo (9-15 March 1916), where the Italians gained Mount Sabatino but saw their advance halted by awful weather conditions. Active fighting started again on 15 May 1916 with the Battle of Asiago, a mammoth Austrian offensive designed to cripple the Italian war effort. However, Russian successes in Galicia (Eastern Europe) forced thousands of Austro-Hungarian troops in Italy to be redeployed and the attack collapsed.









# **WAR**<sup>in</sup> **FOCUS**

## **PRE-WAR PREPARATIONS**

**15 May 1939**

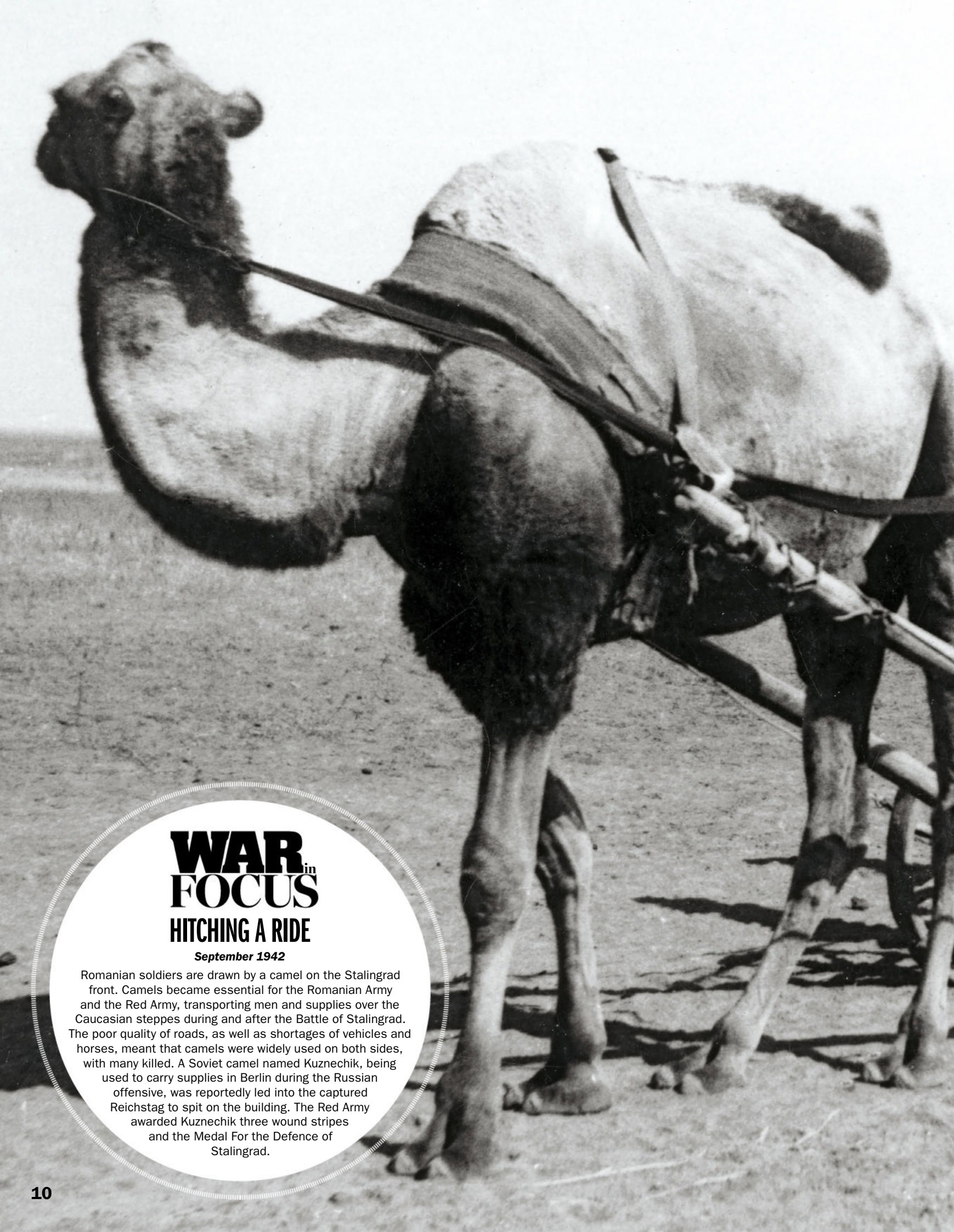
Recruits at Lulworth Camp, Dorset, work on equipment for Vickers-Armstrongs Light Tank Mk IVs commissioned by the British Army during the interwar period. The sixth iteration in Vickers-Armstrongs' Light Tank line was the most advanced, expanded to allow for a three-man crew and a wireless set. Vickers-Armstrongs built 1,682 Mk VIs from 1936-40 and they remained in frontline service until 1942. The British Army faced continuing problems and delays with developing and manufacturing medium tanks, meaning the vast majority of their tanks were Mk VIs at the start of the war.

They became essential workhorses, serving extensively in the Battle of France and North African Campaign.









# **WAR**<sup>in</sup> **FOCUS**

## **HITCHING A RIDE**

**September 1942**

Romanian soldiers are drawn by a camel on the Stalingrad front. Camels became essential for the Romanian Army and the Red Army, transporting men and supplies over the Caucasian steppes during and after the Battle of Stalingrad. The poor quality of roads, as well as shortages of vehicles and horses, meant that camels were widely used on both sides, with many killed. A Soviet camel named Kuznechik, being used to carry supplies in Berlin during the Russian offensive, was reportedly led into the captured Reichstag to spit on the building. The Red Army awarded Kuznechik three wound stripes and the Medal For the Defence of Stalingrad.







## TIMELINE OF THE

# GURKHAS

With unrivalled loyalty and a fierce fighting reputation, the Gurkhas' history shows why they are among the world's most respected soldiers

1814-16

### ANGLO-NEPALESE WAR 01

As the Kingdom of Nepal fights the East India Company for control of mountainous territory, Gurkha defectors join the British forces. Colonel David Ochterlony sees the potential of using these men as irregular forces. They are formed into the Nasiri regiment, impressing Ochterlony with their abilities. After the Anglo-Nepalese War, they are recruited into the British Army permanently as the 1st King George's Own Gurkha Rifles.

June - September 1857

### SIEGE OF DELHI 02

The Gurkhas remain loyal to the Crown during the Indian Mutiny of 1857, exemplified by their actions in the Siege of Delhi. The Sirmoor Battalion fights alongside the 60th Rifles and the Corps of Guides at a defensive position outside the city before mounting an assault on 14 September. They help to recapture the city in intense street-by-street fighting.



Gurkha soldiers with their British officer during the Indian Mutiny

1878-80

### SECOND ANGLO-AFGHAN WAR 03

The Gurkhas' excellence on the battlefield is critical in establishing a political settlement between Afghanistan and the United Kingdom, which lasts for 40 years. They fight at the battles of Ali Masjid and Peiwar Kotal, where one of their white officers, Captain John Cook, receives a Victoria Cross. They then participate in the climactic Battle of Kandahar to secure British victory.

Gurkhas launch a pivotal advance during the Battle of Peiwar Kotal (1878)





Two Gurkha orderlies flying the Union Flag on a Tibetan mountainside with their interpreter



## INDIAN INDEPENDENCE

Indian Independence divides the ten Gurkha regiments between Britain and newly independent India, with the 2nd, 6th, 7th and 10th Gurkha Rifles remaining part of the British Army. Their base moves to Malaya, with a training depot at Sungai Petani in northwest Malaysia.

Gurkhas had a significant presence in the Indian Army for several decades

## BRITISH EXPEDITION TO TIBET 04

The British Indian Army launches a temporary invasion of Tibet in an attempt to resolve ongoing border disputes. The Gurkhas fight well on several Tibetan battlegrounds, including the storming of Gyantse Dzong, where they rapidly scale a rock face to reach a breach in the wall before nightfall.



## THIRD ANGLO-AFGHAN WAR

Another conflict in Afghanistan begins with the Afghan invasion of British India. The 11th Gurkha Rifles works with the RAF and British infantry to drive the Afghan forces back into their territory. Afghanistan is forced to sue for peace and the war ends with the Anglo-Afghan Treaty (1919).

Gurkhas march through Admiralty Arch to the Cenotaph during the Peace Pageant in London, 1919

December 1903 – September 1904

1914-18

May-August 1919

1939-45

1947

## THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The Great War sees 100,000 Gurkhas fighting, with 20,000 casualties. They are present across the Western Front and against the Ottoman Empire in the east. Three of their number – Kulbir Thapa, George Campbell Wheeler and Karanbahadur Rana – earn Victoria crosses during the conflict.

A line of Gurkhas storm a German trench



## SECOND WORLD WAR

The largest deployment of Gurkhas commences during the Second World War, with 130,000 seeing action. One of their standout contributions is during the Italian Campaign, where they contribute to the gruelling Battle of Monte Casino (1944), and help to break the Gothic Line. Gurkhas also serve in Burma with the Chindits guerilla operations against the Japanese, and nine of their number in the 14th Army receive Victoria Crosses.

A Gurkha infantryman pictured in the snow during the Italian campaign







**“THEIR ACTIONS HELPED TO PROTECT THE LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS OF ALL GROUPS IN THE REGION”**

1948-60



## MALAYAN EMERGENCY 05

When the Malayan Emergency begins in 1948, seven of the 13 British Army battalions stationed in Malaya are Gurkha formations. They use their jungle fighting expertise honed in Burma during the Second World War to track and fight insurgents across unforgiving terrain.

*British artillerymen serving alongside the 17th Gurkha Division in Malaya, stood in front of a 25-pounder field gun*

1960-97

## DEPLOYMENT IN HONG KONG 06

The Gurkhas pivot to Hong Kong after the Malayan Emergency. They focus on patrolling the Hong Kong-China border, searching for illegal immigrants during the Cultural Revolution, and establishing the Brigade of Gurkhas Training Depot. The British Army also deploys the Gurkhas to restore order during the 1966 Star Ferry riots.

*A Gurkha helicopter over Hong Kong, March 1973*



1982

## FALKLANDS WAR

The Gurkhas arrive at the Falkland Islands in early June after a 21-day voyage on the QE2. They serve stoically despite coming under sustained mortar and sniper fire, particularly at Mount William. One Gurkha, Captain Bhuwansing Limbu, reportedly remarks “Jolly exciting this, isn’t it?” as his unit takes cover from a heavy bombardment.



*Gurkhas positioned on a hillside near San Carlos Bay*



Gurkhas guard Serbian farmers collecting their harvest near Lipjan, Kosovo



## PEACEKEEPING IN KOSOVO 08

Gurkhas are sent to Kosovo as part of the Kosovo Force (KFOR) intervention. They are deployed predominantly in Pristina, central Kosovo, and work to disarm Serbian and ethnic Albanian guerrillas. Their actions help protect the lives and livelihoods of all civilian groups in the region.



## CREATION OF THE ROYAL GURKHA RIFLES

The four Gurkha regiments are consolidated into the three battalions forming the new Royal Gurkha Rifles. The unit is further consolidated in 1996 with the 2nd and 3rd Battalions being merged during the withdrawal from Hong Kong and the beginning of the Gurkhas UK basing.

Lieutenant Colonel Bijaykumar Rawat (left), the first Nepalese commander in the Royal Gurkha Rifles, with the departing 1st Battalion commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel Nick Hinton



The Gurkhas' campaign gained high-profile support, including from Dame Joanna Lumley

## FIGHTING FOR RIGHTS

Until 2009, only former Gurkhas who had retired since the Brigades headquarters moved to the UK in 1997 could remain in the country. This right was extended to those who had retired before 1997, and 36,000 Gurkhas, along with their families, finally won the ability to settle in the UK.

1990 - 2003

1994

1999

2006

May 2009

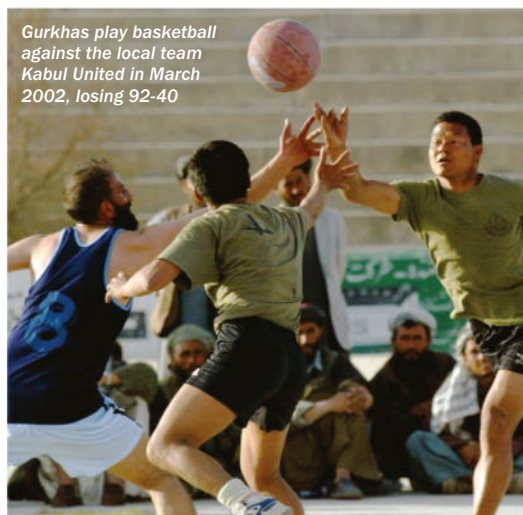
## GURKHAS IN IRAQ 07

The Gurkhas serve in Iraq during the Gulf War (1990-91), with the Queen's Own Gurkha Transport Regiment forming an ambulance squadron. They return to the country for the 2003 Iraq War, joining Operation Telic in signalling, engineering, transportation and logistics roles.

King Charles, then Prince, meets wives of Gurkhas serving in Iraq and is presented with garlands



Gurkhas play basketball against the local team Kabul United in March 2002, losing 92-40



## SECURING AFGHANISTAN 09

1st Battalion Gurkhas join the re-deployment to Afghanistan to tackle the emergent insurgency following the fall of the Taliban. The deployment is the largest for the Gurkhas for over 40 years. They remain until the conclusion of Operation Herrick in 2014. Many continue to be active in Afghanistan for several further years, training Afghan security forces during Operation Toral.

Images © Alamy, Getty



The British force in  
northern India included  
over 1,000 elephants

# A 'GALLANT ADVERSARY'

From respected foes to valued allies, Nepal's armed forces showcased their fighting spirit during war with Britain, only to become one of the Empire's greatest military assets



**B**ritain and Nepal's enduring military bond was forged in fire – on opposing sides. It began with a conflict of interests, culminated in a war of ambitions, but concluded with mutual respect and admiration that came to define the now long-standing relationship.

The stage was set when an expansionist Gorkha Kingdom unified Nepal in 1768. Keen to claim greater swathes of territory, the ruling House of Gorkha continued its conquest beyond its borders, and it seemed a matter of time before such moves would threaten British interests in India. Those interests, broadly defined by the Empire's wish to extend its sphere of influence throughout the Indian subcontinent – including Nepal – had long been administered by the East India Company, itself armed and ready to retaliate to Gorkha encroachment.

By late 1814, Nepal had occupied sizable tracts of northern India under the noses of colonial authorities. In response, the East India Company dispatched an army to humble the Gorkhas, or Gurkhas, and re-establish British dominance in the region. Organised into four fighting columns, the entire contingent comprised 30,000 troops, 60 guns, 12,000 Indian auxiliaries, 1,113 elephants and 3,682 camels. Two columns were sent west to regain lost territory while the other two marched toward the centre of Nepal and the capital of Kathmandu.

Despite boasting numerical and technological superiority, the British were at a disadvantage in several aspects upon the launch of the campaign. Nepal's warriors had local geographical knowledge on their side and, what's more, had newly acquired mountain warfare experience. Perhaps above all else, the well-trained and disciplined Gurkhas, serving under equally competent veteran officers, were known for their extraordinary courage and resilience. The British were, often in the most literal sense, about to face an uphill struggle against a determined enemy in a defender's paradise.

The first significant battle of the Anglo-Nepalese War took place in the western theatre on 31 October 1814. Commanded by Major General Sir Rollo Gillespie, an approximately 4,000-strong British force attempted to seize the remote Indian hill fort of Kalunga (or Nalapani), held by around 650 Gurkhas. Initial assaults failed to dislodge the Nepalese, prompting a frustrated Gillespie to personally lead the next attack in the hope of gaining momentum. Within moments, the British commander was killed when a bullet struck him in the heart.

Gillespie's death was a massive blow to British morale. Not only did Kalunga remain in Nepalese hands for another month – ceded by 30 November 1814 – but was only claimed after the attackers cut off water supplies to the fort. On the last day of the siege, the surviving Gurkhas, who had refused to surrender, staged a breakout and escaped into the hills. Their tenacity in the face of overwhelming odds would come to define future confrontations.

Meanwhile, Major General Gabriel Martindell had succeeded the late Gillespie, and was tasked with taking the hill fortress of Jaithak

in the far west of Nepal's captured territories. From 27 December 1814, in what could be perceived as an unfortunate repeat of recent history, the new British commander was repulsed by stout resistance. Unlike his predecessor, however, Martindell survived, albeit with his confidence shaken.

This Nepalese victory was repeated elsewhere when Major General Bennet Marley, commanding one of the two columns in the central theatre, was ambushed on New Year's Day, 1815. Thrust into close-quarters combat against the Gurkhas' dreaded kukri – a broad-bladed fighting knife with a distinctive curve – the British contingent retreated, leaving Marley paralysed by an over-cautiousness. His fear would prove to be contagious when Major General John Wood, commanding the second column to the south of the Kathmandu Valley, likewise succumbed to its devastating effect.

**“THE BRITISH WERE, OFTEN  
IN THE MOST LITERAL  
SENSE, ABOUT TO FACE AN  
UPHILL STRUGGLE AGAINST  
A DETERMINED ENEMY IN A  
DEFENDER'S PARADISE”**

## GURKHA RIGHTS IN THE UK

In the late 1960s, Gurkha rights came under scrutiny, revealing discrepancies between the UK's approach toward British and Nepalese veterans. Cuts to the British Army had resulted in Gurkhas being discharged with little or no pensions and limited gratuities. Furthermore, a proportion of former soldiers were found

to be living in destitution in Nepal. These main factors prompted the establishment of The Gurkha Welfare Trust to help support affected individuals and their families. Pension controversies, however, have persisted into recent years in addition to Gurkha settlement rights in the UK. British actress Dame Joanna Lumley, whose father served with the Gurkhas, became a figurehead for a campaign that led to many Nepalese veterans who had retired before 1997 earning the right of abode.

Back in the western theatre, the fourth and final British column – commanded by Major General David Ochterlony – offered a shred of light in what had otherwise been a disastrous campaign. Following a series of bitter battles over several weeks and months, Ochterlony had achieved success by gaining a firm foothold in Nepal and, on 15 May 1815, capturing the mountain fortress of Malaun. Momentum was finally with the British, and they had no intention of squandering it. The East India Company drafted a peace treaty that imposed tough conditions on the Nepalese, not least that the nation relinquish parts of its own territories in addition to those it had annexed. With the kingdom having refused to ratify it by December 1815, the British launched a second campaign in January 1816.

An army of over 17,000 troops under Ochterlony commenced its renewed march on Kathmandu. Encountering well-prepared defensive positions, the British leader gambled on a bold flanking manoeuvre over an old smugglers' path that ultimately paid off. Surprised and outnumbered, the Nepalese had little choice but to sign the Treaty of Sugauli on 4 March 1816. Yet while the British had eventually prevailed, the victors acknowledged that their opponents had fought with unbridled bravery and honour. Nowhere is this more evident than the two British-erected monuments at the former Kalunga battlefield, one a tribute to the Empire's own fallen and the other dedicated to a “gallant adversary” – the Gurkhas.

to be living in destitution in Nepal. These main factors prompted the establishment of The Gurkha Welfare Trust to help support affected individuals and their families. Pension controversies, however, have persisted into recent years in addition to Gurkha settlement rights in the UK. British actress Dame Joanna Lumley, whose father served with the Gurkhas, became a figurehead for a campaign that led to many Nepalese veterans who had retired before 1997 earning the right of abode.



*Gurkha veterans rally in Parliament Square, 28 March 2007*



# A KNIFE TO A GUNFIGHT

With their reputation preceding them, the Gurkhas adapted to mechanised warfare while remaining the feared warriors of a bygone era

**E**ven amid the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814-16), the British Empire had begun the process of integrating Gurkhas into its armed forces. This continued throughout the 19th century, with the Nepalese soldiers tasked with protecting India's Northwest Frontier and beyond. From fighting in the Anglo-Sikh Wars (1845-46; 1848-49) to helping quell the Indian Rebellion of 1857, Gurkhas had more than proven their worth as capable, adaptable and dependable warriors. Such qualities were vital with the consistently changing nature of warfare, especially so when the First World War broke out in the summer of 1914.

In this conflict the men faced their greatest challenge yet. At that time, there were ten Gurkha Regiments, each comprised of two battalions. A proportion shipped out to Europe as part of the Indian Corps, eventually deployed to reinforce the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) south of Ypres. 2/8th Gurkhas became the first unit to be sent to the front line, on 29 October 1914, a harrowing experience that saw heavy casualties inflicted upon them within just 24 hours of their arrival. It was just the beginning of their nearly four-year ordeal.

Gurkha battalions settled into life in and out of the trenches, the monotony occasionally shattered by Allied or German attempts

to break the deadlock. During the March 1915 Battle of Neuve Chapelle, for example, 2/3rd Gurkhas served in the vanguard of the assault. Successfully smashing through the German defences, they were followed by 2/2nd and 1/9th Gurkhas pushing forward just short of Aubers Ridge but failing to take the second objective.

At the Battle of Loos from 25 September 1915, Nepalese troops again fought with incredible bravery, notably that of 2/3rd Gurkha Rifleman Kulbir Thapa who, despite his severe wounds, saved the lives of one British and two fellow Gurkha soldiers. He was subsequently awarded the Victoria Cross, the first Nepalese-born Gurkha – as opposed

**“GURKHAS HAD MORE THAN PROVEN THEIR WORTH AS CAPABLE, ADAPTABLE AND DEPENDABLE WARRIORS”**





to white Gurkha officer – to receive the prestigious medal.

While the Indian Corps withdrew from the Western Front in the late autumn of 1915, 29th Indian Infantry Brigade – including 1/5th, 1/6th and 2/10th Gurkhas – had been participating in the infamous Gallipoli Campaign. Nepalese involvement had come at the personal request of Mediterranean Expeditionary Force (MEF) commander General Sir Ian Hamilton. A veteran of the Northwest Frontier, he had hoped that the Gurkhas' combat adeptness in hilly and mountainous terrain could help the Allies secure dominance over the Dardanelles. Hamilton's theory was vindicated almost immediately when 1/6th Gurkhas, the first Nepalese battalion to arrive, successfully seized a Turkish position that had already thwarted British efforts. The feature was dubbed 'Gurkha Bluff' in recognition of their success, yet such acts could not offset the horrific casualties sustained over the coming months.

By August 1915, after a period away from the front to rest and recuperate, 29th Indian Brigade was once more thrust into action within the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) area of operations. Intent on capturing the Sari Bair range, it became 1/6th Gurkhas' task to claim the highest of the ridgeline's peaks. The ensuing battle descended into a savage struggle with kukris drawn once ammunition had run out. Bringing knives to a gunfight worked in the favour of the Gurkhas, who, supported by other Allied troops, managed to push the Turks down the far side of the Sari Bair feature. The men then pursued their retreating opponents until the



*This picture from The War Illustrated Album Deluxe (1915) depicts a Gurkha, kukri drawn, creeping up on an unsuspecting German soldier*

nearby HMS Colne, mistaking the Nepalese soldiers for the enemy, fired on them. Soon after, the Turks counter-attacked and reclaimed their stronghold. Ultimately driven back down towards the beaches, subjected to Turkish artillery bombardments and faced

with worsening weather conditions, it soon became evident that Gallipoli was a lost cause – albeit with the Gurkhas having displayed their characteristic courage and resolve for the duration of the campaign.

Those same traits were evident in the Gurkha battalions at that point fighting in Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq). A part of British attempts to secure Persia's oil fields, the Nepalese warriors exhibited their usual tenacity, playing a critical role in successive – if often-forgotten – operations against the Ottoman troops in that theatre. This, too, was true in Egypt and Palestine, where Gurkha units were involved in numerous engagements – and where, at El-Kefr on 10 April 1918, 19-year-old Rifleman Karanbahadur Rana became Nepal's second Victoria Cross recipient. Members of Rana's 2/3rd Gurkhas likewise served with TE Lawrence (widely known as Lawrence of Arabia) and his Arab guerilla force.

On 30 October 1918, the Ottoman Empire surrendered to the Allies, and within weeks the Great War was over. Nepalese service personnel filtered back into British-controlled India and continued their policing duties, the inter-war period turning out to be anything but peaceful for these seasoned servicemen. However, the scars of the previous four-year conflict had left an enduring impression on the men. From 1914 to 1918, over 90,000 Gurkhas had fought for a distant King and Country, of whom an estimated 20,000 had become casualties and over 6,000 had died. The First World War had also been the first proper chance for Nepal's mountain fighters to witness combat on European soil. It would not be the last.

*Gurkhas move through Gully Ravine in Gallipoli. The Gurkhas' skill at fighting in mountainous terrain saw them play a key role in the Dardanelles*





Frontline

# ON MANY FRONTS

Battling through deserts, across mountains and deep inside jungles, the Gurkhas' deployments epitomised the truly global nature of the Second World War



Gurkhas stationed in Assam, northeastern India, c.1943. The area saw intense fighting against the Japanese



A generation before the Second World War, the Gurkhas' mettle had been tested at Gallipoli. They had prevailed despite the campaign's folly, but now, facing down German armour in Libya's desert sands, the Nepalese warriors were about to be tested again. The 10th Indian Division – including 1/2nd, 2/4th, 2/7th and 2/10th Gurkhas – had been deployed to the Middle East in May 1941, and their arrival broadly coincided with German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel seizing the initiative in North Africa. One year later, 26 May 1942, and the Gurkhas, together with their Allied counterparts, were holding the line outside the coastal city of Tobruk at all costs.

Rommel had broken through the Allies' outer belt of defences by 1 June as 2/4th Gurkhas, among others, were sent out to meet the threat. Supported by artillery, the men offered a valiant resistance but were unable to hold back the seemingly unstoppable Axis forces. The remnants of the battered battalion surrendered on 6 June. Meanwhile, the enemy continued their advance towards the strategically significant Libyan city, where, from 19 June, they met 2/7th Gurkhas as part of the garrison's force. Unfortunately, after exhausting their ammunition fending off repeated German attacks, and with Rommel having broken through into Tobruk's centre, the surviving Nepalese had little choice but to capitulate, and the entire port fell on the 21st.

Bloodied though the Gurkhas were in their latest wartime exploits, they were not out of the fight. As part of Lieutenant General Bernard Montgomery's Eighth Army, Nepalese formations contributed to the eventual victory in the North Africa theatre, their broad-bladed kukris, as in previous centuries, striking fear into the hearts of their enemies.

Nor would their exploits be limited to the desert campaign. In Italy, 1/5th Gurkhas

landed on the mainland as part of 8th Indian Division in October 1943, participating in numerous engagements as the Allies inched northwards. They were soon joined by the North African veterans of 4th Indian Division that December, which was involved in two major assaults against German positions at Cassino from February 1944. 1/2nd, 1/9th and 2/7th Gurkhas, fighting with their usual bravery but sustaining horrendous casualties in the process, were nevertheless unable to dislodge the defenders – a feat ultimately achieved by the Polish in May 1944. Later bolstered by additional Gurkha units, the Nepalese served with distinction for the rest of the Italian campaign until the Germans surrendered there on 2 May 1945.

Prior to victory in Europe, in the Southeast Asian theatre the Gurkhas' fortunes had largely followed that of overall Allied command. Service personnel of 2/1st, 2/2nd and 2/9th Gurkhas had been captured upon the disastrous fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942. Elsewhere, with the Japanese having commenced their invasion of Burma that January, it had been the objective of 17th Indian Division to hold off the enemy advance toward Rangoon. On 23 February, disaster struck the division's Gurkha units at the notorious Sittang Bridge, blown while the Nepalese were still on the Japanese side of the river-spanning structure. Scores of men drowned attempting to swim back across, and many Gurkhas were lost to the currents or were captured by the enemy.

The Nepalese eventually found themselves in the familiar territory of British-controlled India – in the worst possible circumstances. There, the Gurkhas' renowned adaptability again came to the fore as, from 6 February 1943, 3/2nd Gurkhas joined Brigadier Orde Wingate's guerilla-style force known as the Chindits. While the first expedition produced mixed results, the second infiltration in March 1944 – involving

numerous Gurkha units – had the desired effect of disrupting Japanese communications from behind enemy lines. With kukri and unparalleled resolve, the men became masters of jungle warfare – qualities that would likewise be displayed in future conflicts, from clashes in Indochina and the Malayan Emergency to the Brunei Rebellion and Borneo Confrontation.

Gurkha units also played an integral role in the wider actions of Lieutenant General Bill Slim's Fourteenth Army, perhaps most famously during the battles of Imphal and Kohima. In one instance, 1/10th Gurkhas took and held a tactically important ridgeline against repeated Japanese assaults, allowing 17th Indian Division to re-deploy at new positions nearer Imphal. In another, 153 (Gurkha) Parachute Battalion joined 152 (Indian) Parachute Battalion in a fierce engagement at Sangshak from 25 to 26 March 1944. Then there was the fighting in Kohima where 4/1st Gurkhas, in an intense three-day struggle, helped take the Jail Hill feature. The Nepalese warriors, together with the rest of Fourteenth Army, remained steadfast in contesting every enemy-held mile until the Japanese surrender on 15 August 1945.

Approximately 120,000 Gurkhas served in the Second World War across various fronts and in an assortment of roles. Wherever they were, no matter the theatre, regardless of victory or loss, they acted with immeasurable gallantry and fearlessness – a fact showcased through the 12 Gurkha Victoria Crosses earned between 1939 and 1945 (both British and Nepalese-born recipients). But it had come at a tremendous cost: of the estimated 20,000 casualties sustained within some 40 Gurkha battalions, about 9,000 paid the ultimate price. Those sacrifices would reverberate through the often-isolated communities of the Nepalese hills, standing testament to the truly global nature of the conflict.



King George VI inspects Gurkhas at a Norfolk rest camp for returned POWs, June 1945

Images: Alamy, Getty



# THE OLD FRONTIER

The Gurkhas have a complex history with Afghanistan spanning two centuries, from colonial expeditions to combating modern-day insurgencies

**W**hen Gurkhas were deployed to Afghanistan in late-2001 alongside coalition forces, they walked in the footsteps of their forebears. Generations of Nepalese had fought and bled on that same soil over two centuries and would continue to in the subsequent years.

Back in the early 1800s, when British-Gurkha relations were in their infancy, Afghanistan had been treated as a buffer zone between

the Empire and that of expansionist Imperial Russia. Wishing to protect their Indian colony at all costs, by the late-1830s the British had attempted to create an Afghan client state, only to grow distrustful of the influential ruler Dost Mohammed Khan. In response, the governor-general of India, Lord Auckland, assembled an army to restore the formerly deposed pro-British leader, Shah Shuja. The attacking force, with its contingent of Gurkhas, encountered stiff resistance en route. Nevertheless, by August 1839 it had successfully marched on

Kabul then installed the British-backed ruler. The victory was, however, short-lived as it wasn't long until the Afghans turned on Shah Shuja and the situation throughout much of the country deteriorated. Ultimately, after a series of blunders, the British withdrew from Kabul in 1842, with only Assistant Surgeon William Brydon surviving the army's retreat. A new army reclaimed the city within the year.

Gurkhas played a more active role in the Second Anglo-Afghan War from 1878 to 1880, a conflict started with the same motivations of

*Gurkhas from the International Security Assistance Force stationed in Kabul on patrol in the capital, 9 February 2002*





exerting control over Afghanistan's leadership to compete with Russian interests. 5th Gurkhas, joined by the 72nd Highlanders, distinguished themselves in a flanking assault against Afghan defences amid the December 1878 Battle of Peiwar Kotal. Such was their success that a similar flanking manoeuvre, again spearheaded by the Nepalese and highlanders, was implemented the following year at the October 1879 Battle of Charasiab. In a repeat of history, the British had by then achieved their objective of extending their influence only for that control to be eroded with time. Gurkhas were heavily involved in the ensuing engagements, notably at the Battles of Ahmed Khel and Kandahar – all the while strengthening the bond between British and Nepalese service personnel.

In 1919, still recovering from the Great War – although having recently participated under orders in the Amritsar Massacre against Indian protesters – Gurkhas were once more thrust into Afghanistan in the Third Anglo-Afghan War. An opportunistic Amir Amanullah Khan, believing the British were losing their grip, declared jihad and, shortly thereafter, sent an Afghan detachment across the Indian border. There, they surrounded the British fort at Landi Kotal and cut off water supplies from the village of Bagh. 2/1st, 1/11th and 2/11th Gurkhas formed part of the relief force, participating in the First and Second Battles of Bagh, until the Afghans retreated. The British now went on the offensive, seeking to secure the Khyber Pass that served as a route into India. Gurkha units, which were instrumental in

## **“INSTILLED WITH THE SAME GRIT AND FORTITUDE AS THEIR ANCESTORS, THESE PROUD YET COMPASSIONATE NEPALESE WARRIORS HAVE BEEN CONSISTENTLY STEADFAST IN THEIR DUTIES”**

these efforts, endured considerable hardship in helping to clear the surrounding hills. Attempting to advance toward the southern city of Kandahar, the British had likewise set their sights on the strongly held Afghan fortress of Spin Boldak. A detachment of Nepal's versatile warriors eventually scaled the walls, breached the fort's defences and fought on until resistance was snuffed out.

The last major incident of the Third Anglo-Afghan War was the Battle of Thal. Afghan forces surrounded the British garrison, including 3/9th Gurkhas, at the vital railway junction and lay siege until a relief column arrived to break the deadlock. The liberated Gurkhas joined the final push to rout the Afghan army, now on the defensive, on 2 June 1919. Just over two months later – 8 August 1919 – the conflict formally ended with the Treaty of Rawalpindi, and with it the latest chapter of the Gurkhas' experience in Afghanistan.

A new one opened after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. The previous decades had seen the British Army's Gurkha formations undergo several structural changes and participate in missions spanning from Southeast Asia to the Falkland Islands to the Balkans and beyond. Yet there could be no denying the symbolic nature of their return to Afghanistan where, as part of their initial deployments, the Gurkha Reinforcement Company with 2nd Battalion of the Parachute Regiment (2 PARA) were involved in Operation Fingal – aimed to support the new Afghan Interim Authority with their vital security efforts in and around Kabul. Whether training Afghan National Army recruits or helping to improve rural Afghans' quality of life, Gurkha deployments brought unparalleled professionalism and, perhaps most crucially, empathy toward the local population.

Gurkhas also, as always, excelled in a combat role – especially from 2006 when the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) expanded its area of operations, with British forces tasked with securing Helmand Province. The region's terrain became a considerable hurdle for even the technologically advanced British forces, but The Royal Gurkha Rifles (RGR) and, indeed, all personnel from the Brigade of Gurkhas faced the challenge head-on. Instilled with the same grit and fortitude as their ancestors, these proud yet compassionate Nepalese warriors have been consistently steadfast in their duties, whether tackling Taliban insurgents or, centuries ago, the British with whom they now stand shoulder to shoulder.

## **GURKHAS AROUND THE WORLD**

When India gained independence in 1947, six of the original ten Gurkha regiments became part of the Indian Army, while the remaining four transferred to the British armed forces. Those in India were subsequently reorganised and have since served in several of the nation's conflicts. However, recent changes to the Indian Army's recruitment plan have sparked controversy among Gurkha service members, raising questions about their future.

Likewise, off the back of Indian independence in 1949 a proportion of Nepalese veterans joined the newly created Gurkha Contingent in Singapore, a force still used today for neutral peacekeeping and counter-terrorism duties. Additionally, the Sultanate of Brunei has raised its own Gurkha Reserve Unit (GRU) employed as a special guard formation.

*Indian Army soldiers belonging to the Gurkha regiment march during the full dress rehearsal in New Delhi, 23 January 2001, for the Republic Day parade of 26 January*







**BLACK MAY 1943**

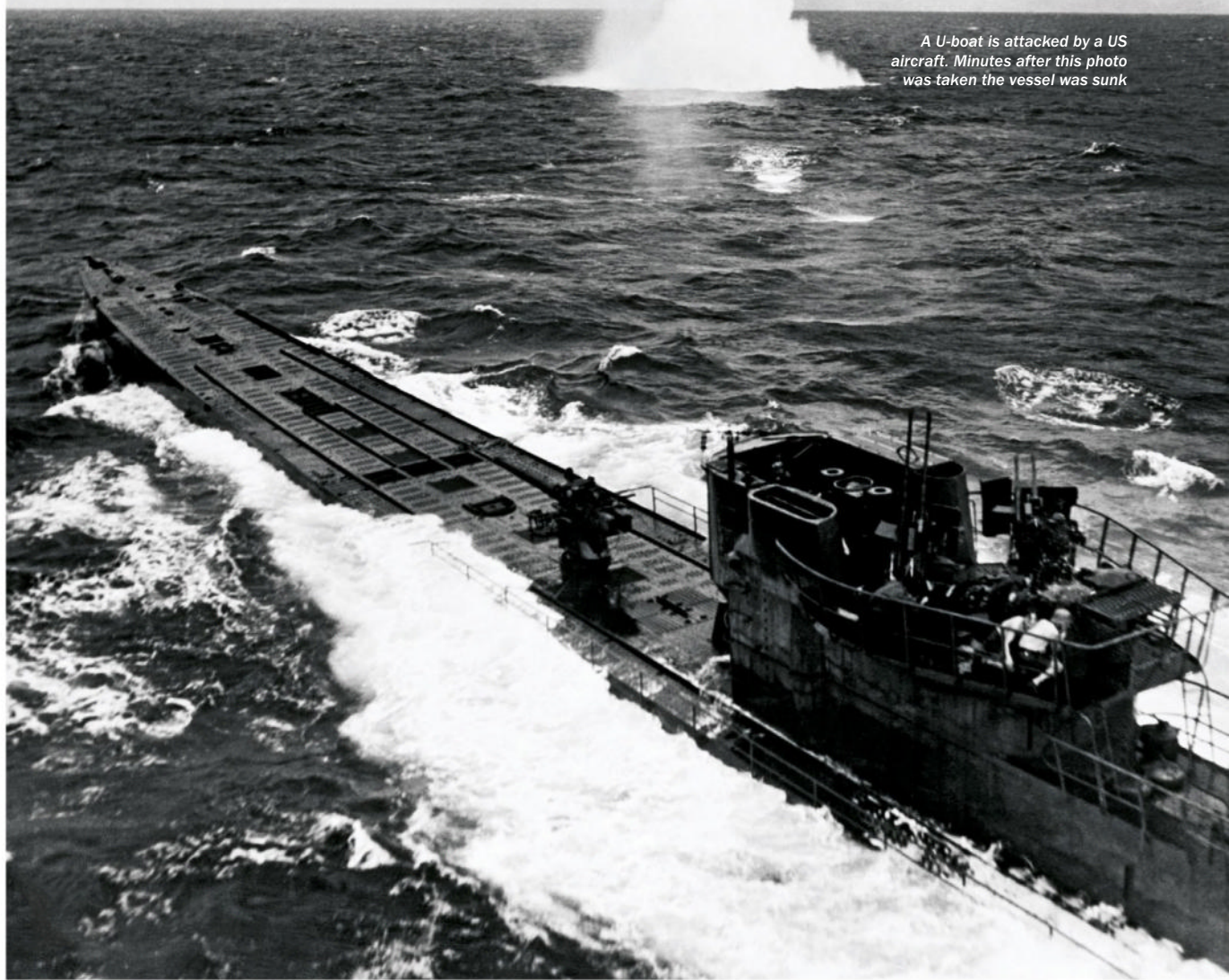
# DEATH OF THE WOLF PACKS

**In one critical month, the Allies combined new tactics and technological innovations to devastate Germany's U-boat fleet, finally gaining the upper hand in the Atlantic**

WORDS MARK WOOD

*By the end of WWII, Germany's U-boat arm had a casualty rate of 70 percent*





A U-boat is attacked by a US aircraft. Minutes after this photo was taken the vessel was sunk

**B**y the close of 1942, Allied shipping losses in the Atlantic had reached a peak, with 1,006 ships sunk by U-boat wolfpacks that year. Many of them were destroyed in the Greenland Gap, the area of mid-Atlantic which was out of range of protective Allied air cover. The following year brought radical changes to the Allied tactical and strategic struggle against the U-boats, with new training, technology and weapons, culminating in a catastrophic month of destruction for the German U-boat fleet. The Kriegsmarine lost more boats during the month of May 1943 than in the entire year of 1941, prompting its senior officers and later historians to remember it as Black May.

#### **‘Attack! Advance! Sink!’**

On the first day of May 1943, the Kriegsmarine's Oberkommando der Marine recorded a total of 134 submarines at sea. Of those, 118 were on station or deploying to rendezvous, with 58 boats in four battle groups already positioned in the North Atlantic. The U-boats had transited from bases on the French and Baltic coasts to gather as the largest submarine force assembled at sea. Their operational mission was to destroy the merchant fleets sailing in convoy to supply Britain from the United States and Canada, driven by the commander of the German U-boat arm Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz's exhortation: "Angreifen! Ran! Versenken!" ("Attack! Advance! Sink!")

Ranged against them were elements of the combined Allied navies supported by the formidable industrial base of the United States and RAF Coastal Command, which included British and Commonwealth aircrew manning

a variety of anti-submarine aircraft. In the words of Sir John Slessor, appointed commander in chief Coastal Command in February 1943, these men were "fighting the elements as much as the enemy, but when the tense moment came, going in undaunted, going in at point-blank range against heavy fire, knowing full well that if they were shot down into the cruel sea, their chances of survival were slender".

Adopting the Rudeltaktik, or wolfpack, devised by Dönitz, U-boats concentrated into patrol lines across the predicted sailing routes of the convoys and attacked at night, either on the surface or partially submerged. Initially, U-boats were able to operate in darkness with almost complete impunity. However, at the outset of hostilities a covert race had begun to develop or adapt technology and tactics that would enable the Allies to gain the initiative in the sea war. By early 1943 that new technology, its teething problems resolved, operated by well-trained and experienced crews, was to change the course of the Battle of the Atlantic.

#### **Technology race**

Until 1943, RAF Coastal Command's surface-detection capability had relied on the ASV MkI and subsequent MkII radar; however, the Kriegsmarine responded by developing the R600A Metox radar detector, which gave U-boats early warning by picking up the radar search signal of approaching enemy aircraft. An updated version, the MkIII, improved the radar scanner reflector, reducing it to 28in (71cm). This gave a 60-degree field of observation that was fitted in the nose of Coastal Command air units. The Planned Position Indicator presented a map image to the unit's display, enabling aircrews to gain a clear picture of any surfaced





A US Navy PBV Catalina flying boat over the Atlantic

**Below:** The forward mess space on a U-boat, illustrating the cramped conditions endured by crewmen

submarines in range. By May 1943 the RAF was able to claim credit for the detection and prosecution of almost all U-boats in the Biscay sea areas.

In conjunction with the ASV MkIII, crews could also turn on the Leigh Light. Named after its creator, Wing Commander Humphrey de Verd Leigh, this 24in (61cm) searchlight had 22 million candlepower (approximately 276.5 million Lumen), and was able to light up detected submarines on the surface and fix them in its powerful beam while an attack was initiated. It became effective almost immediately, and as air crews gained experience in its use, it developed into a devastating instrument feared by the U-boat fleet.

From January 1943, Coastal Command's meagre resources were augmented by a squadron of Consolidated B24 Liberator four-engined bombers. The Liberator proved a godsend for the Allied convoys plying their way back and forth across the Atlantic. Its additional fuel tanks extended the aircraft's range to 3,000 miles (4,830km) and Iceland-based squadrons were able to close the Greenland Gap, enabling constant air cover across the Atlantic.

It was a Liberator bomber that claimed the second victim of Black May. On the 4th, U109, a veteran of four wolfpacks, captained by Oberleutnant zur See Joachim Schramm, a highly regarded former 1936 Olympic athlete, was intercepted on the surface transiting south-west of Ireland by a Liberator of 89 Squadron. Dropping a pattern of four depth charges, the crew of the Liberator initially assumed they had been unsuccessful; however, U109



was then observed slowly sinking beneath the waves, and despite her slow descent none of the crew emerged and all were assumed lost with the boat.

Both U258 and U304 also fell victim to a Liberator, the former on 20 May, depth-charged, rather appropriately, off Cape Farewell, Greenland. U304 was caught eight days later in the same area. Both were sunk by aircraft of 120 Squadron RAF. A further seven U-boats were claimed by flying boats of both the United States Navy (USN) and the RAF. The most successful of these patrol bombers were the Short Sunderland, which sank three submarines during May, and the American-designed Consolidated PBV Catalina, which destroyed four more.

Submarine at sea 1943, by German artist Adolf Bock, depicts a U-boat in choppy conditions, with crew members on the conning tower





On 14 May U640 was sighted by Catalina K of USN 84 Squadron, patrolling out of Reykjavik, Iceland. The crew located the U-boat some 16 miles (26km) ahead of an approaching convoy. Approaching low from the surfaced U-boat's port beam, the Catalina released three 350lb (160kg) depth bombs from a height of 75ft (23m), set with shallow fuses. The depth bombs straddled the U-boat, which was then observed to slow to two knots, trailing air bubbles, before listing at a sharp angle and sinking with its entire crew of 56.

### Swordfish on the hunt

Although the shore-based assets of RAF Coastal Command, supported by aircraft of the USN and Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), accounted for the lion's share of U-boat kills, both U569 and U752 were lost to carrier aircraft. U752 was the victim of some rather inexplicable decision-making by its commander, Korvettenkapitan Ernst Schroeter, who despite warnings of enemy air activity, surfaced and immediately sighted Fairey Swordfish aircraft from the carrier HMS Archer. The Swordfish dove into the attack. The first bomb, a rocket spear, tore a hole in number-four diving tank, through the pressure hull and into the wardroom, flooding the compartment. Sea water mixing with oil rapidly covered the deck plates in the engine room and the batteries were swamped, causing chlorine gas to be released, while the magazines were flooded entirely.

Schroeter gave the order to dive, but it quickly became apparent that the boat's pressure hull was punctured. Unable to remain submerged, the boat resurfaced. The

## "THE FIRST BOMB, A ROCKET SPEAR, TORE A HOLE IN NUMBER-FOUR DIVING TANK, THROUGH THE PRESSURE HULL AND INTO THE WARDROOM, FLOODING THE COMPARTMENT"

gun crew manned the 0.8in (20mm) deck weaponry, which malfunctioned almost immediately. A Grumman Martlet of 892 Squadron flew over, sweeping the deck of the stricken U-boat with machine gun fire, killing Schroeter and a midshipman close by. The engineer officer ordered the crew to abandon the vessel, then proceeded below and scuttled the submarine by opening the vents.

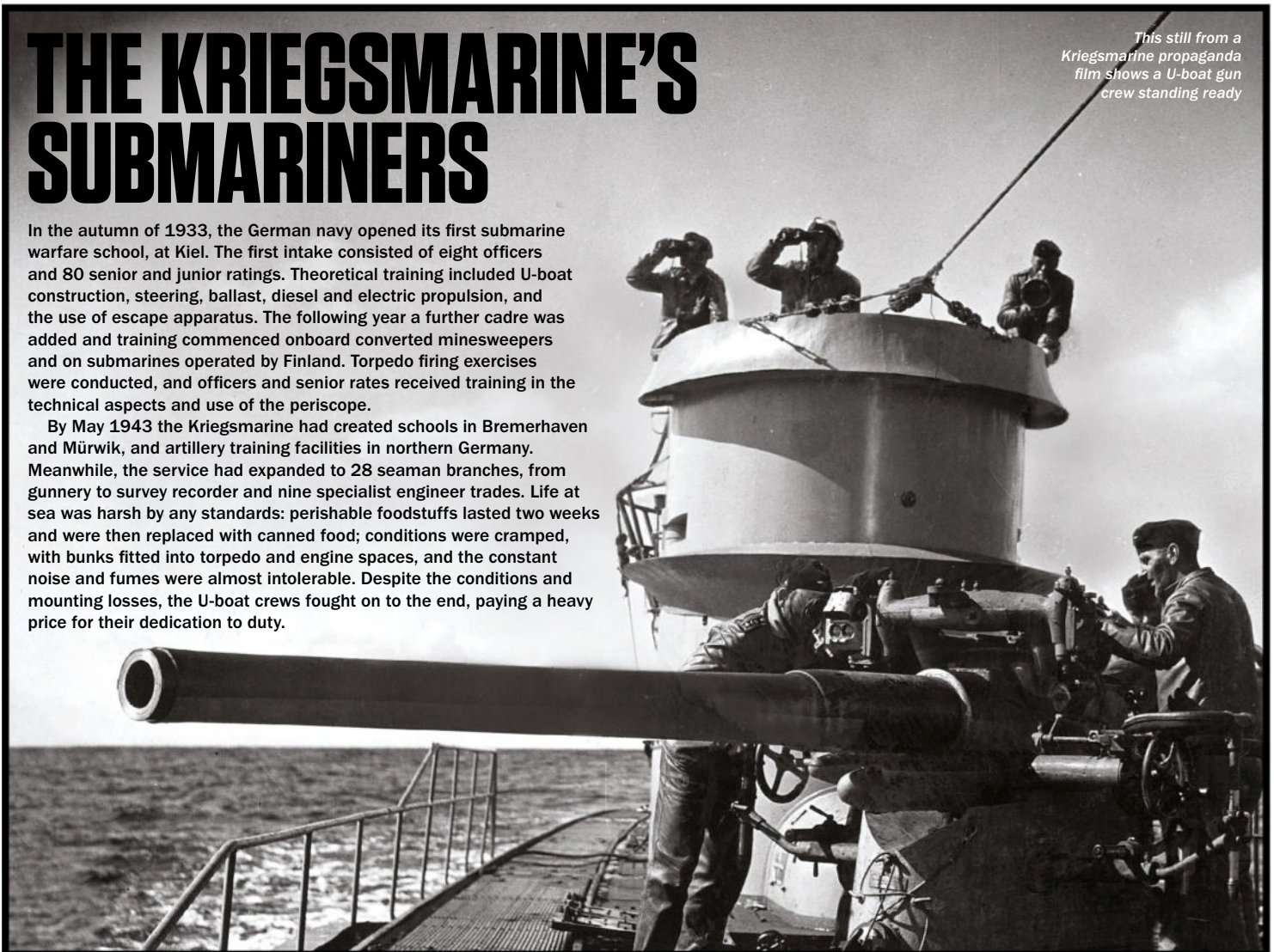
A rating onboard U752, Pinzer, described the experience: "They told us then that small aircraft had spotted us under the water at periscope depth. Then it must have kept right above us, we surfaced and suddenly, 'aircraft 100 metres distant' and instead of opening fire we submerged and were only at a depth of three or four metres when the bomb fell. Immediately a mass of water broke in." Another rating, Elebe, revealed the U-boat was "put out of action immediately as the safety valves in the diesel were smashed and the fuel began to run out. Up by the outside locker a stream of water came from the chief engineer's cabin. Had it only been water which got in, the chief engineer could have held the boat, but it was fuel. It was already all over the deck plates in the control room – that's

# THE KRIEGSMARINE'S SUBMARINERS

In the autumn of 1933, the German navy opened its first submarine warfare school, at Kiel. The first intake consisted of eight officers and 80 senior and junior ratings. Theoretical training included U-boat construction, steering, ballast, diesel and electric propulsion, and the use of escape apparatus. The following year a further cadre was added and training commenced onboard converted minesweepers and on submarines operated by Finland. Torpedo firing exercises were conducted, and officers and senior rates received training in the technical aspects and use of the periscope.

By May 1943 the Kriegsmarine had created schools in Bremerhaven and Mürwik, and artillery training facilities in northern Germany. Meanwhile, the service had expanded to 28 seaman branches, from gunnery to survey recorder and nine specialist engineer trades. Life at sea was harsh by any standards: perishable foodstuffs lasted two weeks and were then replaced with canned food; conditions were cramped, with bunks fitted into torpedo and engine spaces, and the constant noise and fumes were almost intolerable. Despite the conditions and mounting losses, the U-boat crews fought on to the end, paying a heavy price for their dedication to duty.

This still from a Kriegsmarine propaganda film shows a U-boat gun crew standing ready



Images: Alamy, Getty



Crewmen on a US Coast Guard vessel observe depth charges detonating in a skirmish that resulted in the sinking of U175, April 1943

## TIMELINE

# BLACK MAY, 1943

**01.05.43**

● Kriegsmarine's Oberkommando der Marine records a total of 134 submarines at sea.

**04.05.43**

● U109 intercepted on the surface transiting south-west of Ireland by a Liberator of 89 Squadron.

● U439 and U659 collide west of Cape Finisterre, with the loss of 84 crew from both boats.

**06.05.43**

● U192 sunk in the early hours of the morning by HMS Loosestrife.

● U630 and U531 both destroyed by HMS Vidette.

● U438 is depth-charged and sunk by HMS Pelican.

● U125 sinks north-east of Newfoundland, after ramming by HMS Oribi and gunfire from HMS Snowflake.

**08.05.43**

● U663 sunk south-west of Brest, after earlier damage from an RAAF Sunderland aircraft. All crew lost.

**11.05.43**

● U528 sunk north-west of Cape Finisterre by HMS Fleetwood, after being damaged by depth charges from an RAF Halifax.

**13.05.43**

● U753 sunk south-west of Ireland by HMCS Drumheller, HMS Lagan and an RCAF Sunderland. All crew lost.

**02.05.43**

● U465 sunk north-west of Cape Ortegal, by an RAAF Sunderland.

**05.05.43**

● U638 depth-charged and sunk with all hands by HMS Sunflower.

**07.05.43**

● U209 lost, presumed sunk south of Cape Farewell.

● U447 sunk west of Gibraltar by two RAF Hudson aircraft.

**10.05.43**

● U381 goes missing south of Greenland, presumed lost with all crew.

**12.05.43**

● U186 is sunk by a depth charge.

● U456 sunk north of the Azores by HMS Opportune – all crew lost.

● U89 sunk north of the Azores by Swordfish aircraft from HMS Biter along with HMS Broadway and HMS Lagan. All crew lost.

**14.05.43**

● U640 sighted by Catalina K of USN 84 Squadron, patrolling out of Reykjavik, Iceland. Depth-charged and sunk with the loss of the entire crew.

● U236 sunk inside pontoon No5 of the Germaniawerft shipyard, Kiel, during an air raid. No casualties.



**“THE DEPTH-CHARGE EXPLOSIONS DISRUPTED ASDIC, RENDERING THE HUNTER EFFECTIVELY BLIND FOR SOME TIME AFTER”**

### 15.05.43

- U176 sunk in the Florida Straits north-east of Havana by depth charges from a Cuban patrol craft, with all crew lost.
- U266 sunk north-west of Spain by depth charges from an RAF Halifax. All crew lost.

### 17.05.43

- U657 sunk by depth charges from HMS Swale.
- U128 scuttled after being depth-charged by two US Mariner aircraft and damaged by gunfire from USS Moffett and USS Jouett.
- U646 sunk by an RAF Hudson. All crew lost.

### 20.05.43

- U258 sunk by an RAF Liberator south-east of Cape Farewell. All crew lost.

### 22.05.43

- U569 scuttled east of Newfoundland after damage received from two Avenger aircraft from US Navy escort carrier USS Bogue.

### 25.05.43

- U467 sunk south-east of Iceland by a Fido homing torpedo from a US Catalina aircraft. All crew lost.
- U414 sunk north-west of Ténès by depth charges from HMS Vetch. All crew lost.

### 28.05.43

- U304 depth-charged off Cape Farewell.
- U755 sunk by rockets from an RAF Hudson aircraft, north-west of Mallorca.

### 31.05.43

- U440 sunk near Cape Ortegal by an RAF Sunderland and depth charges from HMS Test. All crew lost.
- U563 sunk near Cape Ortegal by British and Australian aircraft. All crew lost.

### 16.05.43

- U182 sunk by USS MacKenzie.
- U463 sunk in the Bay of Biscay by an RAF Handley Page Halifax, with all crew lost.

### 19.05.43

- U954 sunk south-east of Cape Farewell, Greenland, by Hedgehog mortars from HMS Jed and the HMS Sennen.
- U273 sunk south-west of Iceland by an RAF Hudson. All crew lost.

### 21.05.43

- U303 sunk in the Mediterranean, south of Toulon, by a torpedo from the British submarine HMS Sickle.

### 23.05.43

- U752 scuttled after damage taken from a Fairey Swordfish from RN escort carrier HMS Archer.

### 26.05.43

- U436 sunk west of Cape Ortegal, Spain, by depth charges from HMS Test and HMS Hyderabad – all hands lost.

### 30.05.43

- U418 sunk in the Bay of Biscay, south-west of Brest, by RAF Catalina aircraft. All crew lost.





Two depth charges dropped by an RCAF Sunderland explode around the stern of a U-boat, 21 April 1944



U625 is attacked by a Sunderland from 422 Squadron of the RCAF, 10 March 1944

practically half the boat – and it began to run into the batteries.” Of the 47 crew only 17 were recovered.

## Offence as defence

During the first years of the Second World War, Royal Navy use of ASDIC (active sonar detection equipment) in anti-submarine warfare (ASW) was dictated by the deployment of depth charges from astern. This required the ship to pass over the intended target before dropping depth charges from racks sited astern; the resultant explosions disrupted ASDIC, rendering the hunter effectively blind for some time after and making relocation of enemy contacts very difficult.

Captain Frederic John Walker, popularly known as ‘Johnny’, was born in Plymouth in 1896 and joined the Royal Navy in 1909, spending the First World War as an officer onboard destroyers. During the post-war period, Walker took an interest in sub-surface operations and took courses at the new anti-submarine warfare school HMS Osprey in Dorset. He understood that, rather than rely on passive defence, it was imperative to aggressively take the fight to the enemy and he was instrumental in creating the five support groups which used tactical mobility to reinforce areas of a convoy under attack and actively hunt the predators.

Walker adapted to the problem of ASDIC blindness by devising what he called the creeping attack. Having located a U-boat at depth, a directing ship trailed the submarine

at a distance of 1,500 to 2,000 yards while the attacking ship, acting on instructions from the directing ship by radio, took up station between the directing ship and target at a speed of five knots and dropped depth charges, immediately clearing the target area at speed. The directing ship was able to detect any evasive action by the submarine and then dropped a further pattern of depth charges over the target. The slow approach of the attacking vessel left the U-boat commander unaware of the impending launch of depth charges and also protected the attacking ship from the latest German acoustic torpedoes, which were ineffective against ships travelling at low speeds.

The plaster attack was a variation on the creeping attack, utilising four vessels rather than two. Three ships sailed in line abreast formation over the U-boat, directed by a fourth vessel behind them; the centre ship of the three attackers positioned directly over the submarine, so that any evasive left or right turn by the U-boat commander brought them under another attacker and further depth charges.

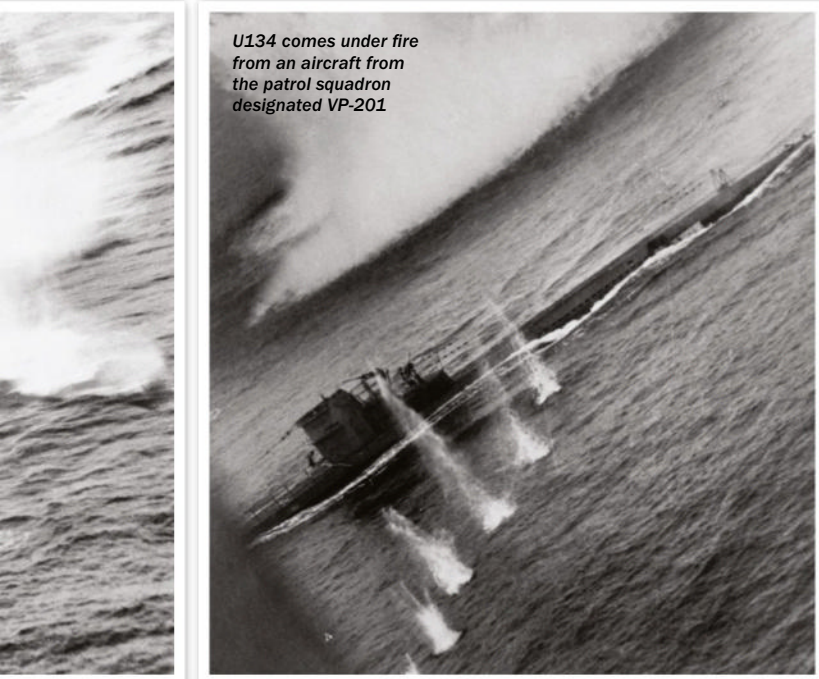
Walker believed in an unrelenting training schedule that drove his crews to exhaustion but which firmly instilled the ASW doctrine and skills needed in the Atlantic struggle. The Royal Navy was also the first to create extensive ASW training facilities and produced the attack trainer, a simulator which reproduced conditions at sea and put officers and ASDIC operators through their paces in a realistic warfare environment.

**“AT THE END OF MARCH 1943 OVER HALF-A-MILLION TONNES OF DESPERATELY NEEDED SHIPPING HAD DISAPPEARED INTO THE DARK WATERS OF THE ATLANTIC”**



HMS Vidette, a V-class destroyer, was credited with five U-boat kills, three of them during Black May





*U134 comes under fire from an aircraft from the patrol squadron designated VP-201*

At Western Approaches Command in Liverpool, Captain Gilbert Roberts had realised that U-boats were infiltrating into the convoy formation, firing their torpedoes then submerging to wait while the convoy passed overhead. Roberts devised a tactic with the unlikely name of Raspberry, which called for escort ships to trail the convoy and attack the U-boat once it had resurfaced after the convoy had passed and the commander assumed it was safe.

### Darkest before the dawn

By March 1943, the Allies had reached their lowest ebb. During this month the four-day battle between U-boats and Allied escort vessels for convoy HX229/SC122, on its way from New York to Britain, resulted in the sinking of 22 merchant ships for the loss of a single U-boat. At the end of March over half-a-million tonnes of shipping had disappeared into the dark waters of the Atlantic. During April 1943, a further quarter-of-a-million tonnes were lost. The Admiralty in London acknowledged that the German submarine arm had come perilously close to entirely 'disrupting communications' across the Atlantic Ocean.

It was towards the end of April that the most significant struggle of that year began, which would continue on into the month the Kriegsmarine would later christen Black May: the battle for convoy ONS5. The convoy of 42 freighters and tankers, sailing in ballast or loaded with goods, was routed from Liverpool to Halifax, Nova Scotia, departing Britain on 21 April 1943. Two wolfpacks, Star and Fink (Finch) totalling 43 U-boats, attempted to penetrate the escort group B7's mixed screen of seven destroyers, frigates and corvettes led by Commander Peter Gretton RN, and attack the vulnerable ships lumbering their way through the Atlantic swell. The slow speed of the convoy made necessary by the inclement weather and heavy sea state conserved fuel oil but made refuelling from the accompanying tankers impossible. Leading Sick Berth Attendant Howard Goldsmith onboard HMS Snowflake remembered: "There were times there when the convoy was literally stationary because some of the merchant ships couldn't make headway against the wind and the sea." Escort vessels averaged a fuel consumption of eight percent daily, rendering the convoy extremely vulnerable to foul weather which also forced many ships off course, thereby requiring the escorts of B7 to chase stragglers back into position.

ONS5 reached the Star wolfpack patrol sector on the morning of 28 April, being observed and reported by U650.

Images: Alamy, Getty

# THE COMMANDERS

## Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz

Dönitz joined the Imperial German Navy in 1911. He served as an officer in the surface fleet primarily in the Black Sea fighting the Russian navy but transferred to submarines in 1916. In July 1918 his U-boat was sunk in the Mediterranean by a British destroyer – Dönitz survived and spent his captivity on Malta. As an experienced submarine officer he was selected to command the Kriegsmarine's fledgling U-boat service. During the mid-1930s he devised much of his tactical planning for sub-surface warfare, including the Rudeltaktik, or wolfpack, method.

Dönitz realised early on that Germany's failure to implement Plan Z – the re-equipment and expansion of the navy – would leave the U-boat arm as the primary means by which Germany could challenge Britain at sea. The initial success of the U-boats vindicated his belief that submarines were the future of naval warfare, and in 1943 he was appointed commander-in-chief of the navy. But in 1943 events overtook Dönitz as the Allied navies overwhelmed the Kriegsmarine, and by the end of 1943 the Battle of the Atlantic was all but over. Dönitz was nominated as Führer of Nazi Germany by Hitler during the last days of the war and was responsible for negotiating the surrender of German forces in 1945.

After serving ten years in Spandau Prison for war crimes, Dönitz was released in 1956. He spent the remainder of his years in relative obscurity, writing his memoirs and books on German naval history, and corresponding with historians. He died in December 1980 in Schleswig-Holstein, West Germany.

*Right: Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz with German naval ratings during a ship's inspection*



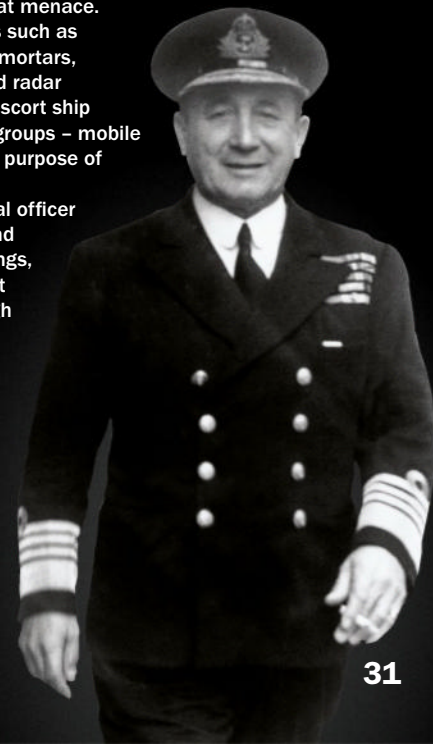
## Admiral Sir Max Horton

Horton joined the Royal Navy in September 1898 as a 14-year-old cadet onboard the training ship Britannia, and by the outbreak of the First World War he had risen to the rank of lieutenant commander in charge of the submarine E9. Sub-surface warfare was still in its infancy, and Horton was an extremely successful submarine commander, sinking and damaging a substantial number of German ships. By 1920 he had attained the rank of captain, his decorations including the Distinguished Service Order with two bars. A steady career trajectory throughout the 1930s brought promotion to vice admiral in 1937 and full admiral in January 1941. He took on the role of commander Western Approaches and it was here that Horton came into his own.

As unsparing of himself as he was his subordinates, he instituted rigorous training programmes and strove to incorporate new technology with innovative ideas to combat the U-boat menace. Horton saw the potential of new weapons such as the Hedgehog and Squid anti-submarine mortars, along with more technologically advanced radar and sonar systems. As well as updating escort ship tactics, he pioneered the use of support groups – mobile units of ships ranging freely with the sole purpose of destroying submarines.

Probably the most knowledgeable naval officer of his time, Horton was viewed as cold and unapproachable by both officers and ratings, appearing indifferent and aloof. Intolerant of errors, those failing to maintain his high standards were immediately replaced. Far more organised and experienced than Dönitz, his work consumed his every waking hour and he is generally considered the finest anti-submarine commander of the age. Horton died in 1951 at the age of 67.

*Right: Horton was at the forefront of implementing new tactics and technology to defeat the U-boats*







A Type VIIC U-boat is attacked on the surface by an American naval aircraft in the Atlantic Ocean

Maintaining contact with the convoy, U650's presence was augmented by four further U-boats; however, her contact reports had warned Gretton of the threat, and HF DF radio-direction finding detected an arc of enemy vessels from the port beam round to astern of the convoy.

Three days into the voyage, a B17 Flying Fortress of 206 Squadron RAF from Benbecula air base in the Outer Hebrides located the German submarine U710 on the surface south of Iceland and some 10 miles (16km) ahead of ONS5. It engaged with a pattern of depth charges and the U-boat commander made the unwise decision to fight back with the boat's 3.5in (88mm) naval gun – the unequal fight concluded with the loss of U710 and her entire crew of 49. This encouraging early success was merely a precursor to a rapid series of U-boat kills, and Walker's anti-submarine tactics and training were about to

prove extremely fruitful for the escort vessels of the Royal Navy. On 5 May, while providing close escort to convoy ONS5, HMS Sunflower, a Flower-class corvette, picked up the Type VIIC boat U638 on ASDIC south of Greenland and proceeded to mount a creeping attack with her Hedgehog weapons system. Mortally damaged, the U-boat was able to transmit a last desperate signal stating it had been hit and was sinking. Nothing further was heard and U638 was lost with all hands. In the early hours of the following day, HMS Loosestrife, a Flower-class corvette, tracking a contact east of the coast of Labrador, dropped a spread of depth charges which sank the ill-fated Type IXC/40 U192 commanded by Oberleutnant zur See Werner Happe, killing its entire crew. U192 had sailed from Kiel on 13 April on her maiden voyage and was perhaps the most short-lived U-boat of the war, its first and only patrol lasting just 23 days.

That same day, U438 was depth-charged and sunk by the Egret-class sloop HMS Pelican, while the V-class destroyer HMS Vidette destroyed U630 and U531 northeast of Newfoundland, both with depth charges and with no survivors recovered from either boat. Sensing that the assault on convoy ONS5 was proving too costly in U-boat losses, Dönitz called off his wolfpacks and the struggle concluded as Fink and Star withdrew to wait for further operational orders from Berlin. The battle for ONS5 is considered decisive by naval historians, with 13 merchantmen sunk, a relatively sustainable loss against seven U-boats destroyed and a further seven damaged.

On 12 May U186 succumbed to a depth-charge attack from HMS Hesperus during a 'plaster' manoeuvre, all 53 of the crew were lost with the submarine. U182, U657 and U128 were lost mid-month in quick succession. The former had been unsuccessfully attacked by a Liberator on 15 May, but the following day the boat was located by the destroyer USS Mackenzie and sunk with depth charges.

**Below:** A Hedgehog – a 24-barrelled anti-submarine mortar – mounted on the forecastle of HMS Westcott





U657 and U128 were both sunk on 17 May, U657 by depth charges from HMS Swale while U128 was destroyed in a masterly piece of air-sea coordination between two Mariner flying boats. They depth-charged the submarine to the surface then directed two USN destroyers onto the target, which they prosecuted with gunfire. The captain of U128 ordered the U-boat scuttled and, the sea cocks having been opened, the surviving 47 crew surrendered having lost seven of their number.

Black May grew darker still for the head of Germany's navy when on 19 May the Type VIIC boat U954, tracked by the sloop HMS Sennen and frigate HMS Jed, was attacked with the Hedgehog mortar system and sunk in a classic creeping attack. A veteran of five wolfpacks, U954 was sent to the bottom with her entire crew, among them Leutnant zur See Peter Doenitz, the youngest son of the grand admiral.

On the 21 May U303 was ordered to depart her home port of Toulon on the French coast and join the Mediterranean U-boat fleet. Sailing from port, U303 was intercepted by the British S-class submarine HMS Sickie and hit by two torpedoes, reportedly sinking in less than 30 seconds in a rare clash of sub-surface vessels.

Two further U-boat losses on 25 and 26 May brought the total loss to 43: 25 percent of operational U-boat strength, the majority in the Atlantic and Biscay approaches. The losses that month were ruinous for all protagonists. The Royal Navy's escort ships may have emerged unscathed, but 58 merchant vessels were sunk with catastrophic loss of life. Allied shipping losses in the Atlantic dropped to 284 for 1943 for the destruction of 237 U-boats, and to 31 ships the following year with 242 U-boats sunk.

By the summer of 1943 the morale of U-boat crews was in freefall and the seasoned wolves of the Atlantic had become resigned to their fate. In a conversation between U-boat crewmen taken prisoner in early May, their fatalism and despair was all too apparent with one, Schmeling,



saying: "The good times of the U-boat sailing are past." In reply his companion, Tillmanns, answered: "My cousin was drowned between 26 and 28 June last year, up there in the 'Rose Garden' between Scotland and Iceland. We picked up W/T messages from him and then he was gone; nothing more came through."

A combination of devastating air power (particularly the Liberator), training, new tactical thinking and adaptability, and the development of advanced technology that far outstripped German efforts to keep up had achieved impressive results for the Allies.

Meeting with Hitler at the Führer's Berghof residence in Obersalzberg on 31 May, Dönitz lamented: "These losses are too high. We must conserve our strength, otherwise we will play into the hands of the enemy." It wasn't until 15 years after Germany's defeat that Dönitz, who survived the war and at Nuremberg was sentenced to 10 years in prison, was able to acknowledge the decisive turning point in the war at sea. Referring to Black May, he admitted bluntly: "We had lost the Battle of the Atlantic." At the war's end, the U-boat arm had suffered the most grievous losses of any service, both Allied and Axis, with over 27,000 dead and missing – a casualty rate of 70 percent.

**"THESE LOSSES ARE TOO HIGH. WE MUST CONSERVE OUR STRENGTH,  
OTHERWISE WE WILL PLAY INTO THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY"**

– GRAND ADMIRAL KARL DÖNITZ –



## FURTHER READING

- Michael Gannon, *Black May* (Harper Collins, 1998)
- Lawrence Paterson, *The U-boat War – A Global History 1939-45* (Osprey, 2022)
- Alan Burn, *The Fighting Captain: The Story of Frederic Walker* (Pen & Sword, 2022)



WHAT IF...

# THE ALLIES HADN'T CRACKED THE ENIGMA CODE?

Without breaking Nazi Germany's encrypted messages, Allied forces would have lost the intelligence war, significantly altering the course of WWII

## INTERVIEW WITH



### Dermot Turing

Dermot Turing is an author, historian and the nephew of Alan Turing. He has written numerous books about the Bletchley Park codebreakers. Turing's latest book, *The Enigma Traitors: The Struggle to Lose the Cipher War*, is out now



### Larry Paterson

Larry Paterson is an historian and musician who has published over 20 books on the Second World War. He has written extensively on the Kriegsmarine, most recently in *The U-Boat War*, where he explores the global nature of U-boat operations.

When radio communication was first deployed on the battlefield in the late-19th and early 20th century, military commanders faced a challenge: how to ensure these wireless messages did not fall into the hands of the enemy? One of Nazi Germany's answers to this was Enigma, an encoding machine that had unprecedented capabilities to encrypt communications, with only the intended recipient with their own Enigma able to decrypt and read the message.

During the Second World War, breaking the Enigma encryption took painstaking effort by Allied forces, including the Polish intelligence services and the work of Alan Turing and his team at Bletchley Park. Cracking the code provided essential intelligence to Allied commanders, particularly in the Battle of the Atlantic. Here, historian and author Dermot Turing, and naval historian Larry Paterson, tell us what could have changed if the Allies had failed to achieve such an extraordinary codebreaking feat.

### Dermot Turing

**What was the Enigma code and why was it such a formidable challenge for codebreakers?**

At the beginning of the Great War, the introduction of radio communications made armed forces aware that they needed to think about encryption. Broadcast media was accessible to anybody who happened to be listening. The military devised primitive encryption techniques whereby common words or phrases could be disguised by having code sequences held in a code book.

However, these code books were easy to reconstruct through linguistic analysis. During the interwar period, the Germans invented the Enigma machine, which enciphered a message, so every letter was converted. Instead of a classic Caesar Cipher, where a letter is changed in the same way each time, the encryption happens a different way every time a letter on an Enigma machine is pressed. The Enigma machine exploited this idea of changing the cipher every time through a set of rotors, constantly changing the pattern of encryption.

By the time the Second World War came, the Germans had souped up their machine

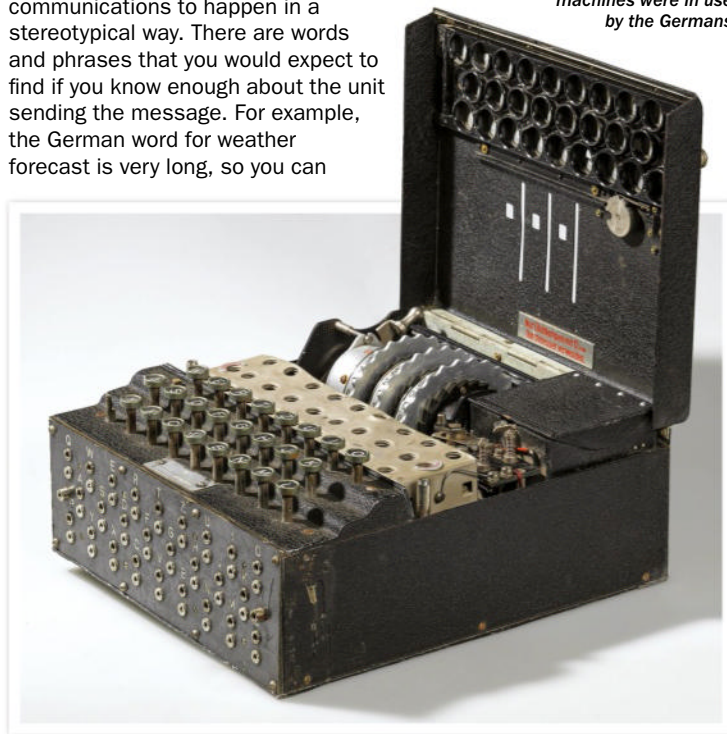
and gave Allied codebreakers two huge problems. There were millions of different possible ciphers that the machine could generate and 150 million ways to set up the machine each day. All the linguists used to the old-fashioned codebreaking style were utterly bewildered by the complexity of this mechanical encryption problem.

**Describe the development of the Polish Bomba machine and how Alan Turing used it to develop the Turing-Welchman Bombe?**

To tackle the Enigma problem, the answer was not to try linguistic interpolation but to find a mechanical solution to reduce the search space to be manageable. Polish codebreakers decided to apply an old codebreakers' technique in a new and imaginative way, which reached the codebreakers at Bletchley Park weeks before the outbreak of war in the summer of 1939.

They realised that you could match up what you thought the intercepted message might say based on the tendency for military communications to happen in a stereotypical way. There are words and phrases that you would expect to find if you know enough about the unit sending the message. For example, the German word for weather forecast is very long, so you can

**Below: During WWII 40,000 Enigma code machines were in use by the Germans**



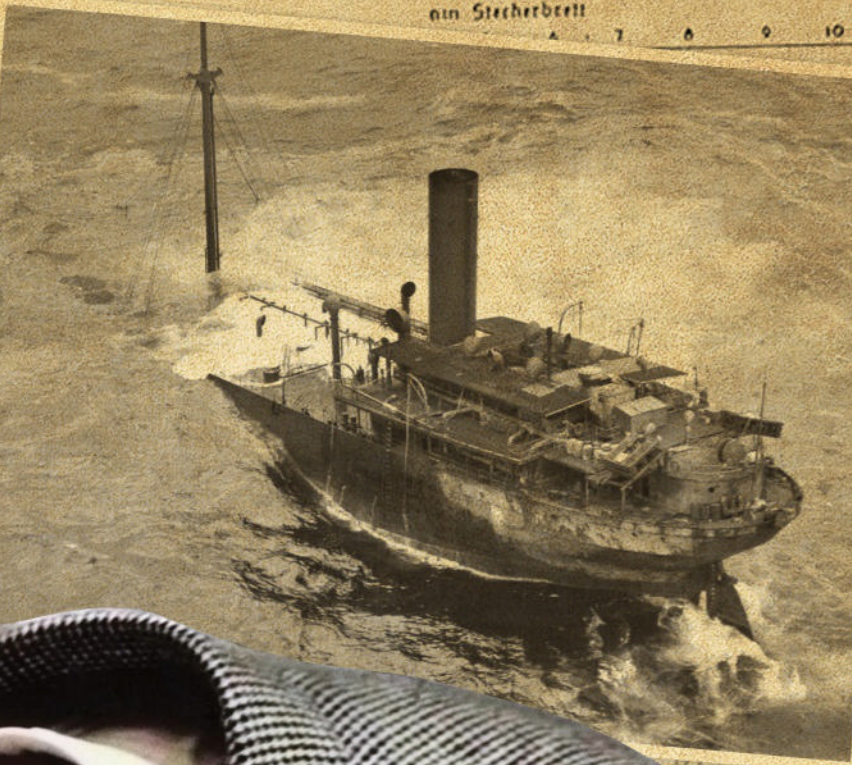


# Luftwaffen-Maschinen-Schlüssel Nr. 649

**Achtung!** Schlüsselmittel dürfen nicht unversehrt in Feindeshand fallen. Bei Gefahr restlos und frühzeitig vernichten.

Meßzeit in s	Wolkenlage	Richtung	Windstärke	Windrichtung	Windgeschwindigkeit	Windrichtung
31	I	V	III	14	09	24
30	IV	III	II	05	26	02
29	III	II	I	12	24	03
28	II	III	V	06	08	16
27	III	I	IV	11	03	07
26	I	IV	V	17	22	19
25	IV	III	I	08	25	12
24	V	I	IV	05	18	14
23	IV	II	I	24	12	04
22	II	IV	V	01	09	21
21	I	V	II	13	05	19
20	III	IV	V	24	01	10
19	V	III	I	17	25	20
18	IV	II	V	15	23	24
17	I	IV	II			
16	V	II				
15	II					
14	IV					
13						
12						
11						
10						

Siehe Verordnungen  
am Steuerbrett





## WHAT IF THE ALLIES HADN'T CRACKED THE ENIGMA CODE?

match up the letters in the expected plain text – 'wettervorhersage' – with the gobbledegook intercepted from the wireless. You could then ask if it is possible to get the letters for 'wettervorhersage' from the Enigma machine's initial setting and get the plain text encrypted in the observed way.

That is the essential principle of Alan Turing and Gordon Welchman's adaptation of the Polish technology, which was designed to simplify the search process by having the machine weed out vast numbers of impossible solutions. Of course, it might not work if the word 'wettervorhersage' doesn't appear in the message, but this is an area where success breeds success. The more messages you decrypt, the more likely it is that you can predict the content of the next one. By developing this machine, called the Bombe, the Brits were beginning to get on top of the German Air Force Enigma messages by Autumn 1940. As the war developed, they were slowly able to get on top of the German Army and the German Navy messages too.

### ***Can you point to any specific events you would define as being significant impacts of the Enigma code being cracked?***

There's quite a lot of hype about this and we need to be slightly wary. People tend to imagine that everything from Bletchley Park was the product of Enigma codebreaking. It's not always possible to work out the type of intelligence used in certain circumstances. However, I think you can point confidently to the turnaround in the Battle of the Atlantic in the middle of 1943, where the British and the Americans got on top of the U-boat Enigma. That meant they could begin safely routing convoys away from



*Intelligence gained through decrypted Enigma messages significantly disrupted Italian convoys bound for North Africa*

and aggressively target U-boats. I don't think that would have been possible without the contribution of Enigma intelligence.

You can also point to the battles in North Africa earlier in the war, where information about Rommel's supply lines was seriously enhanced by breaking Italian Enigma messages. The Italians were responsible for the Trans-Mediterranean convoys that were supplying Rommel. Breaking their Enigma messages and other machine ciphers enabled Italian convoys

to be targeted and gave a good picture of Rommel's complaints about his supply needs. In Africa, a good combination of different sources came together to help Bernard Montgomery in his successful campaign.

### ***If the Enigma code hadn't been cracked, what would've been the impact on the quality of intelligence coming out of Bletchley Park?***

One thing that struck me while working on my most recent book, *The Enigma Traitors*, is that

*Bletchley Park in Buckinghamshire, which was the centre of Allied codebreaking efforts*





## **“NOT ONLY DID WE KNOW WHERE THE U-BOATS WERE IN A CONVINCING AND PERMANENT WAY, BUT WE WERE ALSO NO LONGER TELLING THE GERMANS WHERE WE WERE”**

the British were embarrassingly slow to wake up to the fact that their codes, still of the Great War model, were being exploited. There was an ongoing complacency from the people who didn't want to change anything.

The thing that made this bad news – being told by the communications security people [who were] listened to for the first time – was that broken Enigma messages revealed that the Germans were deriving their intelligence from reading British codes. If the British had not been reading Enigma messages, then the happy state of disbelief would have continued. Had that mindset persisted, the consequence could have been that an awful lot of battles won by the Allies as a result of superior intelligence would have been turned around. The Germans would have been winning battles based on superior intelligence. The state of affairs in the early part of the war, where the Germans knew exactly where the convoys were, could have persisted across all theatres and armed forces. That is quite scary to think about because we're accustomed to thinking that the Allies won the intelligence war because of the genius of Bletchley Park, but it could have been the other way around.

The turning point in the middle of 1943, when the battles of North Africa had been won and the Allies were beginning to win the Battle of the Atlantic, is crucially dependent on being on top of the German intelligence story. I'm not convinced that the turning point would have happened had we not reluctantly changed our codes in June 1943. Not only did we know where the U-boats were in a convincing and permanent way, but we were also no longer telling the Germans where we were.

That contribution to the Battle of the Atlantic and the fact that we had shut the Germans out of our intelligence was crucial and dependent on us reading Enigma. Meanwhile, because the Germans didn't read much British high-level machine-enciphered traffic during the Second World War, they couldn't access the same knowledge about our codebreaking efforts. That explains why the war's second part was much more successful than the first.

*Alan Turing, mathematician and cryptanalyst, who developed the Bombe machine to consistently crack the Enigma code*

### ***Would failure to crack the Enigma code have been a fundamental crisis for the war effort?***

I'm not one to argue with Professor Harry Hinsley, author of the official history of British intelligence in the Second World War, who was at Bletchley Park. His opinion was that the work of Bletchley Park as a whole, not just Enigma, shortened the war by about two years, saving millions of lives. What he's not saying is that it would have affected the outcome. The overwhelming might of the United States' war machine, coupled with the rotten state of the Axis powers and their inability to bolster their efforts with some moral fibre, was going to spell doom for the Axis powers eventually, but at what cost?

You look at how awful it was for Europe to recover from the ravages of the Second World War and the consequences of another two years of that conflict is horrendous to think about. Not breaking Enigma might have affected the outcome of particular battles, but it would probably have just prolonged this awful conflict.

Ultimately, you don't win wars by intelligence alone, but it is a contributing factor and let's not underestimate its power. You win wars by fighting, but the distance of time has

allowed our celebration of Bletchley Park to put into the shadows the stories we used to hear of the Second World War. In some ways, it has sanitised the war, which makes me slightly uncomfortable.





## THE PAST

1932

### MARIAN REJEWSKI CRACKS ENIGMA

Six years after the Wehrmacht began using the Enigma machine to encrypt messages in 1926, Polish mathematician Marian Rejewski cracked the Enigma code. After obtaining the daily keys used in Enigma machines in September and October 1932 from a French spy, Rejewski made comparisons with intercepted messages to uncover the internal rotor wiring of Enigma machines. He then built the Bomba machine to reliably decrypt Enigma messages.



1940

### CONSTRUCTION OF VICTORY

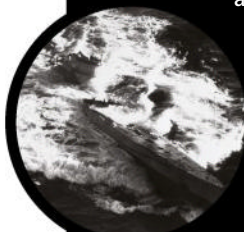
At the outbreak of the war, Germany made its Enigma machines more complex, rendering the Polish Bomba obsolete. However, Alan Turing learnt from Rejewski's Bomba to create his mechanised Bombe. The first successful machine was called Victory and began codebreaking on 14 March 1940. Collaboration with Gordon Welchman led to the more efficient Agnus Dei Bombe design, and by the end of the war 211 Bombe machines had been built.



1943

### A TURNING POINT IN THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

Enigma intelligence began to be used effectively during the summer and autumn of 1941, particularly in the Battle of the Atlantic. Routing convoys around U-boat patrols reduced merchant shipping losses by two-thirds. A turning point was reached during Black May in 1943 when 25 percent of operational U-boats were destroyed.



Karl Dönitz greets returning U-boat crewmen in 1941. He relied upon Enigma codes to give orders to U-boats at sea

### Larry Paterson

#### How did U-boat commanders use Enigma?

The Enigma was the standard coding machine of the Kriegsmarine. At times, Enigma would deal with home waters, such as when a ship needed to meet an escort to go in and out of the harbour. Then, when U-boats were at sea, they needed Enigma to co-ordinate for Karl Dönitz's wolfpack tactic. The group needed to know exactly where the boats were and coordinate their location using the Kriegsmarine grid chart and Enigma messages to order U-boats into position. Then, it would be used to report back to Dönitz's headquarters.

#### Describe the situation in the Battle of the Atlantic before the Enigma code was cracked in June 1941

This is where my opinion differs from a lot of other historians. The U-boats began the war incredibly under-strength. There were 57 operational U-boats, most of which were coastal, with very few boats in the Atlantic. The idea that the Germans were cleaving their way through convoys left, right and centre at the beginning of the war is not true. There were some incredibly bloody battles involving a small number of convoys, which certainly took a toll, but the popular image of the 'Happy Time' where U-boats had everything their own way is off-kilter.

However, they were giving the British the runaround in 1940 because of the problems in Dunkirk and the Royal Navy was under-strength. They couldn't throw as many ships or convoy escorts into the Atlantic battle as they would want to. This meant the U-boats had some success but were still taking severe casualties right from the word go.

#### How did the Allies use intelligence gained from codebreaking to disrupt and sink U-boats?

It was a disaster for the Germans. It was the same situation that Erwin Rommel was facing in North Africa. When you're fighting a war and your enemy can see your orders, that puts you at a serious disadvantage. Once the Enigma had been broken, there was a layer of arrogance within the upper command of the Kriegsmarine despite growing

suspensions. The Germans had noticed strange coincidences, with British submarines turning up where U-boats were meeting in far-flung corners of the Atlantic and convoys re-routing around where U-boats were concentrating. A German investigation began, but it was always operating on the principle that Enigma was so sophisticated no one could break it.

#### Can you expand on the other tools the Allies had for tracking submarines and would they have been effective if those were the only tools they had available?

The Allies won the technological war in so many other ways apart from cracking Enigma, and a combination of tools defeated the U-boats. An excellent tool for the Allies was radio direction finding. When radio was used to transmit messages, the Allies picked it up with vessels equipped with radio-finding gear. Then, they would detect a transmission on a particular bearing and triangulate the signal with nearby vessels to get a rough position for where the signal was originating from. The most successful captain of the war, Otto Kretschmer, was famously captured in 1941. People called him 'silent Otto' and thought it was because he was a shy man. Actually, it was because he refused to send these endless messages, convinced that Allied direction finding was triangulating the U-boats. Kretschmer was right.

The Allies also perfected radar to a greater degree than the Germans and put it in aircraft. That robbed the U-boats of their ability to operate on the surface, which is where they were at their best. A U-boat on the surface is fast, agile and hard to spot. Captains like Kretschmer and Günther Prien would sail inside a convoy and start firing torpedoes left and right. Once the Allies robbed U-boats of this ability through radar, the submarines were forced underwater where they were slow. Here, the Allies could use Asdic and sonar, hunting U-boats to exhaustion until they had to surface.

#### What was the wolfpack tactic and how would its success have changed without the Allies cracking Enigma?

The German group tactic known as the wolfpacks was the brainchild of Karl Dönitz,



a U-boat commander in the First World War. He had a theory that grouping submarines would make them more effective against commercial traffic. The Allies defeated the U-boats in the First World War by grouping merchants into convoys, removing the easy prey of solo sailing merchant ships. Convoys were reintroduced early in the Second World War and Dönitz's idea was to have a patrol line of U-boats comb a part of the map to find them.

Once a U-boat made contact with a convoy, it would transmit beacon signals to the rest of the patrol line, grouping them together near the merchants. The U-boats would co-ordinate their positions through further radio signs before Dönitz gave the order to attack. The idea was that the wolfpack would swamp the enemy escort ships and get at merchants. It was a sound principle that worked a few times, but positioning the U-boats for attack required a lot of radio traffic, which was their Achilles heel.

However, regardless of the Enigma code being broken, Dönitz did not have the U-boat numbers he needed to use the wolfpack tactic. He wanted to go to war with 300 U-boats, which would have been catastrophic for the

Allies. Instead, he had 57, most of which were little Type Twos toddling around the North Sea. His tactics relied on numbers and by the time Dönitz had enough U-boats, Germany had lost the technological war.

**All things considered, could the failure to crack the Enigma code have swung the tide of the Battle of the Atlantic and the outcome of the Second World War?**

It would have swung it, but more was needed to change the outcome. I don't think the Germans ever stood a chance of winning the Battle of the Atlantic, nor did the commanders in chief of the Kriegsmarine, Erich Raeder and Dönitz.

When you are dealing with the U-boats, the legend exceeds the reality. If the Enigma code hadn't been broken, then the U-boats would have undoubtedly caused greater casualties among the Allied convoys, but I don't think it would have changed the war's course. If the Enigma code for the Luftwaffe, Wehrmacht and Waffen SS also hadn't been cracked, that could have been detrimental. It would have allowed the Germans to regain their camouflage, stopping the Allies from anticipating their every move.

Attacks on Allied merchant shipping in the Atlantic by U-boats such as this were significantly reduced thanks to the code being cracked



## THE POSSIBILITY

1939

### AXIS POWERS WIN THE INTELLIGENCE WAR

Having failed to pick up warnings that the Axis forces were exploiting their Great War-era codes, the British would not have updated their encryption technology. Now, the Axis forces would have superior intelligence on the battlefield, which would have swung the tide of some battles.



1943

### DISASTER FOR ALLIED CONVOYS

In May 1943, the U-boat strength peaked at 240 operational submarines. Without Enigma intelligence, Allied convoys wouldn't have been able to manoeuvre around U-boat patrols, which would have been less vulnerable to Allied attack. Dönitz could finally have deployed his wolfpack tactic as he imagined it, with devastating effect.



1947

### WAR IN EUROPE IS OVER

War finally comes to an end in the summer of 1947, but it is a Pyrrhic victory for the Allies with millions more killed. Without Enigma intelligence, every victory has been significantly more costly in men and materiel. After two additional years of war due to the failure to beat Enigma, cities across Europe have faced even greater destruction and the process of reconstruction will take even longer.







CHEMIN DES DAMES, FRANCE  
16 APRIL - 9 MAY 1917

Great Battles



# NIVELLE OFFENSIVE

Based on winning tactics from Verdun, this audacious attack was unexpectedly thwarted by Germany's new, innovative defensive system

WORDS LOUIS HARDIMAN



Men of the II Colonial Corps launch a second wave of attacks, while in the distance the first wave reaches the German outpost trenches on the Chemin des Dames

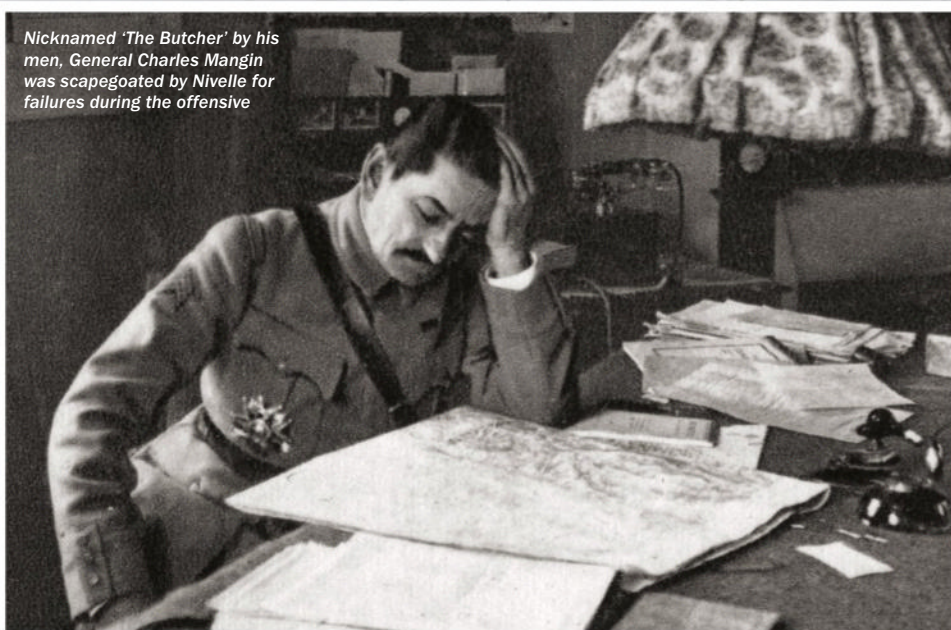


**O**n a cold night in January 1917, German infantry launched a raid at Main de Massiges, east of Reims, and came across plans to attack the Aisne River. General Erich Ludendorff declared it a “capital piece of information”. The Germans’ alarm grew after another raid in March 1917 led to the discovery of French General Robert Nivelle’s “Instructions Concerning the Aim and Conditions of a General Offensive”, revealing the planned operation’s incredible scale. Despite these disastrous leaks, Nivelle continued widely circulating operational plans. The dam of his secrecy ultimately burst open with the capture of a sergeant carrying a document detailing the movements of specific units.

That is not to say that Nivelle ever seriously tried to protect intelligence on the offensive. While lobbying for support, he showed the press and politicians his ambition and promised a breakthrough within 48 hours. The press and the Chamber of Deputies then publicly debated aspects of his proposal. It was said every waiter in Paris knew about the coming action. Yet Nivelle’s openness with the French political and media establishment made his rise to commander-in-chief possible. The French needed a charismatic and politically acceptable alternative to General Joseph Joffre, who had resisted any attempts from politicians to interfere in military matters.

Nivelle wasn’t just an effective lobbyist, he was also a respected general who had cut his teeth at Verdun in 1916. There, he had ended localised stalemates by deploying overwhelming violence concentrated on weak points in the

Nicknamed ‘The Butcher’ by his men, General Charles Mangin was scapegoated by Nivelle for failures during the offensive



enemy line. By removing the need to attack along the whole front, Nivelle hoped to bring to an end the long, grinding battles that defined the Western Front. Nivelle’s offensive began to take shape as he implemented his Verdun tactics on a larger scale at the front, between the bastions of Soissons and Reims.

He chose the Chemin des Dames as the site for the battle, a road hugging the plateau north of the Aisne River. The ancient route had been paved by King Louis XV so his daughter could visit one of her ladies-in-waiting, and it

had been the site of a critical battle during another invasion of France in 1814. Located 62 miles (100km) from Paris, it naturally blocked the most direct route to the capital. The sector had been quiet since 1914 and Nivelle hoped to stretch its relatively small defensive force through Allied diversionary attacks elsewhere. These were primarily at Vimy Ridge and Arras from the British and Canadian forces, and Nivelle was pushing for further attacks from the Russians and Italians. Then, his 52 divisions and 7,000 big guns could smash through the

## OPPOSING FORCES



**CENTRAL  
POWERS  
(GERMANY)**

### LEADERS

Erich Ludendorff  
Crown Prince Wilhelm

### MEN

480,000

### ARTILLERY

2,430



**ALLIES  
(FRANCE)**

### LEADERS

Robert Nivelle

### MEN

850,000

### ARTILLERY

7,000

### TANKS

128









Berry au Bac

Cormley

Brimont

Courcy

Reims

## 09 BATTLE OF THE OBSERVATORIES

Major fighting in Aisne concludes with the Battle of the Observatories, lasting from 23 May to 2 June. The primary German counter-attack occurred on 2 June between Laffaux and Berry-au-Bac, supported by flamethrowers in some sections. The attacks were mostly unsuccessful and the French even gained some ground in some areas, such as Chevreux as marked.

## 05 SIXTH ARMY SEES FIRST MAJOR SUCCESS

The Sixth Army continues to fight overnight 16/17 April and eventually forces the Germans to withdraw four miles (6.4km) from Bray-Condé-Laffaux. The German withdrawal is so rapid that they leave multiple guns and vast quantities of ammunition behind.

## 06 TENTH ARMY CAPTURE THE PLATEAU DE CALIFORNIE

Nivelle orders his reserve, the Tenth Army, to advance between Fifth and Sixth Armies on 21 April. The IX and XVIII corps take over in the Craonne sector and advance onto the Plateau de Californie.

## 08 MAJOR COUNTER-ATTACKS BEGIN

For two nights between 6-8 May, German counter-attacks begin across the front to recapture their lost defensive zone. The Plateau de Californie is a continued focal point of persistent German counter attacks, all of which are repelled.

## 07 SIXTH ARMY REACHES ALLEMANT

The 5 May begins with a Sixth Army advance from a salient opposite Laffaux. They face waves of German counter-attacks while pushing north from Laffaux Mill. By the end of the day, they've reached the outskirts of Allemant and captured 4,000 prisoners.

German lines, advancing six miles (10km) each day, bringing the stalemate on the Western Front to a victorious conclusion. Convinced his triumph was inevitable, he promised "a splendid harvest of glory for the British and French armies".

## Defence in depth

By April 1917, Nivelle's masterstroke tactic at Verdun was already outdated, designed to exploit the German Army's tactic of deploying a single, 'unbreakable' line, with no room for withdrawal and within range of French artillery. In response, Ludendorff published *The Principles of Command in the Defensive Battle in Position Warfare*, which detailed the defence in depth doctrine.

Anticipating Nivelle's tactic at Chemin des Dames, Ludendorff ordered his forces to pull back to the Hindenburg Line, leaving only an 'outpost' sector within range of French artillery. It was just 0.6 miles (1km) deep and loosely defended to reduce casualties. Ludendorff commanded these outpost defenders to weaken the French charge before it reached the 'battle' sector – a far superior defensive area up to 1.2 miles (2km) deep and positioned on the reverse slope of hills to ensure surprise and protection from artillery.

Ludendorff filled the battle sector with machine gun posts and concrete pill boxes that could take a direct hit from an artillery shell. Communication trenches connected the positions to transfer the wounded and create bottlenecks in the enemy's advance. Men in defensive positions were drilled in the doctrine of elastic defence, falling back under attack before *Eingreif-Divisionen* (intervention divisions) would spring back in counter-attack to reclaim the lost ground. Finally, the rearward sector

**Below:** Robert Georges Nivelle, commander in chief of the French Army and commander of the Nivelle Offensive in 1917



Images: Getty



stretched back as far as possible, holding support facilities and heavy artillery.

Defence in depth meant disaster for Nivelle's men, who were forced to attack up and over the Chemin des Dames ridgeline. They would have to cover up to 6.2 miles (10km), climb 600 vertical feet (180m) of steep Aisne Valley hills and clear fortified positions before they reached the rearward sector.

### A brutal first phase

Nivelle's plans were under strain even before a shot was fired. The diversionary attacks from France's allies were not on the scale he had envisaged, because the Italians were too spent, and the ongoing revolution to the east made Russia's support fragile. It was up to the British at the Battle of Arras and the Canadians at Vimy Ridge to pull the German defensive focus north from the Chemin des Dames. Starting on 9 April, the British and Canadians suffered huge casualties, including the loss of one-third of the Royal Flying Corps (RFC), but Nivelle could not capitalise due to poor weather. Any further delays would leave the British and Canadians out to dry, forcing Nivelle into action despite the continuing bad weather.

The first signs of the coming offensive came on the night of 15 April. Germans in the outpost sector donned their gas masks and hunkered down against the trommelfeuer (drumfire), the

## "MERCILESS ARTILLERY FIRE RAINED DOWN ON CRAONNE AND PUSHED THE FRENCH BACK FROM THE VILLAGE"

name they had given to the endless, rhythmic and ear-splitting bombardments that preceded major Allied attacks. By this time, the Germans had already observed the preparations for the offensive from their position at the top of the Aisne valley, but the drumfire indicated the offensive was imminent.

As the Sun rose on 16 April, French soldiers charged across no man's land, advancing through artillery blasts and machine gun fire – falling in droves. Most of the initial wave did not reach the battle sector, as they struggled up the steep banks of the Aisne River. The remaining French soldiers crashed headlong over the ridge and found themselves silhouetted against the morning sky, easy targets for the machine gunners on the reverse slope. Attacking in the eastern sector, the Fifth Army made minor advances into Bermericourt but fell in huge numbers against heavy shelling while trying to take the redoubt in Brimont. These efforts were futile as the Fifth Army survivors were turned around by midday when the Germans moved their reserves forward. The only French success was to the north,

where the 42nd and 69th Divisions managed to advance 2.5 miles (4km). Meanwhile, the Sixth Army attacks led to the capture of 3,500 POWs, but they only reached the battle sector once.

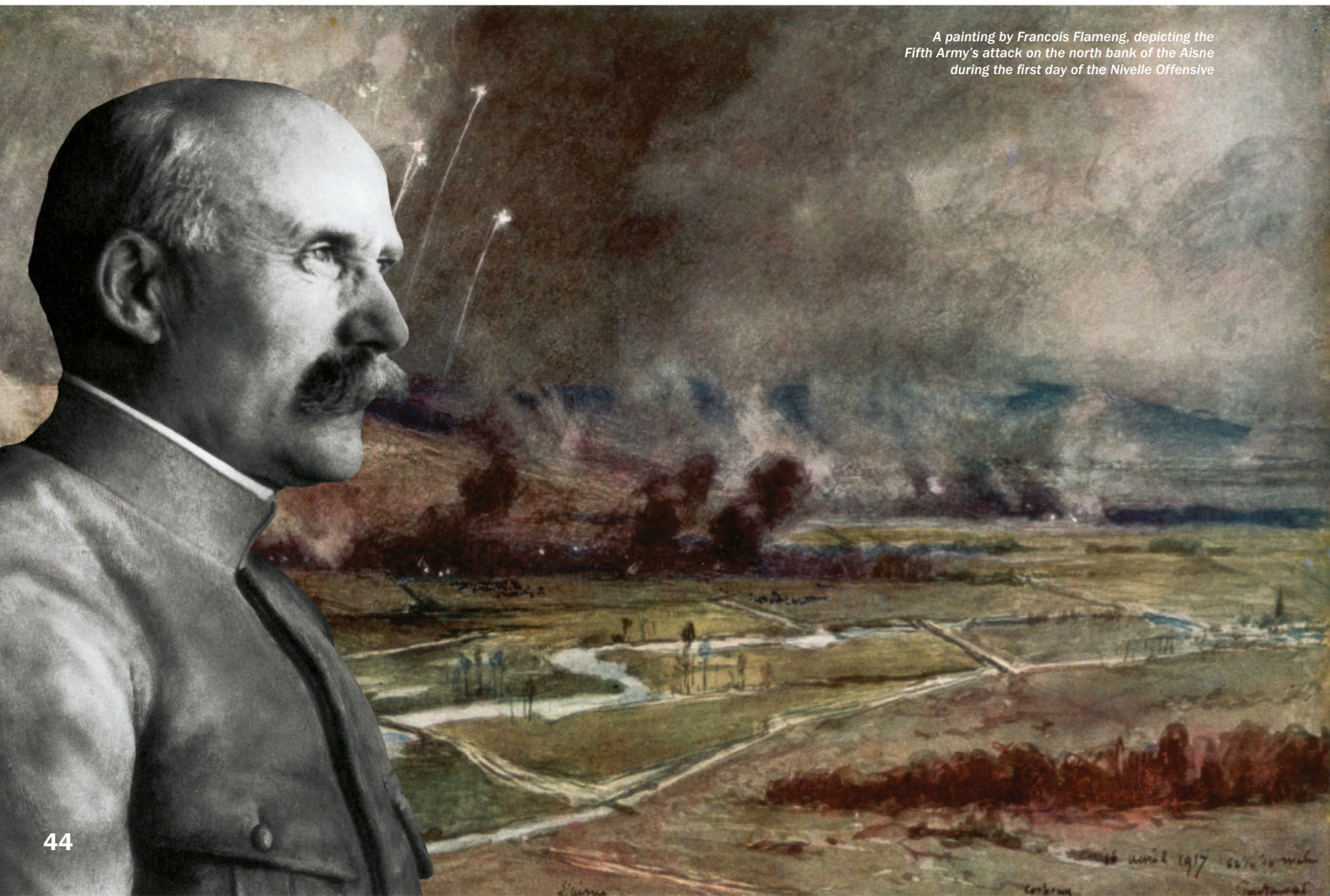
Meanwhile, the 1st and 2nd Divisions faced Craonne, a tiny French village. Napoleon had fended off Russian and Prussian forces from this exact plateau over 100 years previously at the Battle of Craonne (1814). A 1st Division report described the strategic significance of the village: "A village hanging on the bluff, below the almost vertical wall of the Plateau de Californie." The German positions in Craonne enabled them wide views of the French positions, making for an effective artillery observation post.

The assault on Craonne was disastrous as the grounded French Air Service could not conduct reconnaissance operations. Describing his surprise at the stiff defences, General Paul Jules Henri Muteau wrote: "In the fields east of Craonne, a large number of bunkers materialised." French infantrymen carried grenades and 1.5in (37mm) guns to take out the bunkers but were overwhelmed by their sheer number. At a high cost, the Germans were forced to withdraw before merciless artillery fire rained down on Craonne and pushed the French back from the village.

For wholesale advances of less than 550 yards (500m) in most sectors, the French suffered 40,000 casualties on the first day. "We have just taken part in one of the greatest crimes of the war," reflected one French

**Below:** General Philippe Pétain, appointed commander in chief of the French Army after Nivelle was fired

*A painting by Francois Flameng, depicting the Fifth Army's attack on the north bank of the Aisne during the first day of the Nivelle Offensive*





An overwhelmed French field hospital struggles to deal with casualties from the Nivelle Offensive



**Below:** General Erich von Ludendorff commanded the German defence at the Nivelle Offensive using his revolutionary defence in depth strategy



**Below:** A destroyed French Schneider CA tank. They were deployed for the first time at the Nivelle Offensive but struggled to navigate mud, anti-tank ditches and German artillery. Of the 128 deployed, 52 were destroyed on the first day



infantryman. The suffering of those injured was unimaginable, made more horrific by the lack of medical facilities. Expecting low casualties after overwhelming the Germans, Nivelle had planned inadequate medical staff and field hospitals. The tide of wounded was overwhelming, and thousands had to wait outside overnight for treatment. Thousands more died in no man's land, in freezing rain, because of a shortage of stretcher parties.

On 17 April, the focus shifted to the Fifth Army as Nivelle attempted to break through to the northeast, bypassing the Chemin des Dames. He believed the Germans would be preoccupied with holding ground against the Sixth Army and would be unable to deal with this new pressure. He could not have been more wrong, with the Fifth Army failing to make any ground. Meanwhile, the Sixth Army was

less active, only manoeuvring to cover Fifth Army's left flank. Yet they saw tremendous success when the Germans abandoned the exposed salient at Vailly and pulled back to the Chemin des Dames. The Sixth Army had finally made it onto the plateau.

### First charge of the French tanks

Among the mud, blood and shell craters of the Nivelle Offensive's first day, the French Tank Corps rolled onto no man's land for the first time. Nivelle brought two formations of Schneider CA 1 tanks to the front at Berry-au-Bac, chosen because its relatively flat ground offered maximum mobility. Each group was paired with infantry, with the tanks close behind as mobile artillery. On the right of the line, the formation led by Commandant Louis Bossut was making good progress, although they were

starting to lose tanks, destroyed by artillery or rendered immobile by the mud. Bossut was among the early casualties, and the tanks entered the German battle zone without their commander. This was where their progress stopped as German artillery observers on the Plateau de Californie quickly called in strikes against them. The latest in mechanised warfare soon became crumpled and smoking metal hulks, and the crewmen who could escape from the wrecks fled back to French lines.

The formation pushing on towards Berry-au-Bac from the left faced even bigger problems. Anticipating a mechanised attack, the Germans had widened their trenches so the tanks couldn't get across them. Unable to advance and stuck in a column, they were sitting ducks, and the French infantry had to assault German positions without the planned tank support.



# REBELLIOUS AFTERMATH

The Nivelle Offensive brought devastation to the iconic Chemin des Dames ridgeline. Within the shell holes, tangled barbed wire and shell-scarred concrete bunkers lay hundreds of thousands of dead and wounded men. The Allies suffered 187,000 French casualties, with 134,000 amassed from 16 to 25 April. Meanwhile, Germany suffered 163,000 casualties, with a further 20,000 captured. Nivelle's plan achieved some local gains, but the cost was deemed too high and he lost his position on 15 May. He was replaced by Philippe Pétain.

The Nivelle Offensive brought the French Great War death toll up to a million, five percent of the fighting-age males in France, lighting a powder keg of discontent in the French Army. Disorder began to bubble up on 29 April and open mutiny was sparked on 3 May when the 2nd Colonial Infantry refused to go to the front. The rebellion spread to the 32nd Corps on 20 May, with the unit singing *The Internationale* and refusing orders to move up to the frontlines.

The spirit of rebellion swelled quickly, engulfing nearly half of the French Army. Mutineers organised demonstrations, refused to attack and threatened their officers, although they did remain at their positions to ensure the Germans could not launch successful attacks. They hoped to demonstrate to the government that they were "men and not beasts to be led to the abattoir to slaughter", as one infantryman put it. All the while, they rallied around *La Chanson de Craonne* (*The Song of*

*Craonne*), written anonymously following the obliteration of the eponymous village. Such was the subversive impact of the song that the French government banned it until 1974.

Ludendorff didn't capitalise on the chaos in the French ranks, fearful that his men would be influenced by the French revolutionary impetus, giving Pétain time to deal with the mutinies. The crackdown began on 8 June with mass arrests and the court-martialing of 3,247 participants. The courts sentenced thousands to hard labour and executed 49 ringleaders. Alongside this stick, Pétain offered his men the carrot of longer leave, an end to large offensives until US troops arrived and improvements in the rations.

Fighting on the Chemin des Dames continued that summer, and the sector would never return to its previous quiet while both sides held a high point on the plateau. French gains made during the Nivelle Offensive were gradually chipped away by German shock-troop assaults characterised by their overwhelming violence. This stalemate ended with the Malmaison Offensive in October, where the French used heavy artillery, such as the 15.8in (400mm) railway howitzer. One German infantryman wrote of these bombardments: "If we had held out a finger, it was a dead certainty that it would have been shot off." Under this strain, the Germans finally fell back from the Chemin des Dames.

The first French tank assault had been an unmitigated disaster: the French Tank Corps lost three-quarters of its vehicles, either broken down or destroyed by relentless artillery bombardments, while 143 of the 720 crewmen became casualties. The tank assault was so calamitous that the French Tank Corps was almost abolished, only saved by the appointment of Philippe Pétain as commander in chief after the Nivelle Offensive and his friendship with French tank pioneer Jean Baptiste Eugène Estienne.

## A deceptive calm

After the initial chaos of the battle, a lull set in on the 19th while troops from both sides recovered from their efforts. News of the disaster and the 96,000 French casualties was spreading and Nivelle returned to Paris to meet Prime Minister Alexandre Ribot and President Raymond Poincaré. They were horrified to learn that the Chemin des Dames was now drenched in French blood and pleaded with Nivelle to avoid more losses. He agreed to their demands, having been considering a tactical shift regardless, as any further Sixth Army progress northeast would only create an exposed salient until the Fifth Army could advance. Instead, the Sixth Army operations would be limited, aiming to consolidate control of the Chemin des Dames ridgeline. At the same time, the Tenth Army pushed through the centre

*Left: Crown Prince Wilhelm, commander of the Army Group German Crown Prince. His force was used during counter-attacks across summits at the Chemin des Dames and the Moronvilliers Hills to the east of Reims*

**"WHAT SEMBLANCE OF CIVILISATION REMAINS ON THESE CHALKY SLOPES? NOT A ROAD, NOT A TREE, NOT A SHACK. THIS OUTLINE OF A PATH – RECOGNISABLE DESPITE ITS RAVAGED STATE AND THE CRATERS LEFT BY THE SHELLING – IS THE CHEMIN DES DAMES"**

**Novelist Roland Dorgelès on visiting the battlefield in the early 1920s**



*Above: The military ceremony at Cerny-en-Laonnois on the Chemin des Dames, where 5,195 victims of the Nivelle Offensive are buried*





to protect the right flank and finally gain control of Craonne.

Operations by the Fifth, Sixth and Tenth Armies continued with a limited scope, although the work was still grinding and costly for the thousands of men involved. Machine gun fire and continuing poor weather halted these efforts before the French could secure a foothold. The only significant gain of territory came on 5 May during a Sixth and Tenth Army offensive pushing eastwards from Laffaux at the western edge of the operation.

Nivelle was already thinking about how he could be absolved of blame for the failure, immediately passing the buck onto General Charles Mangin, commander of the Sixth Army. He transferred Mangin to the inactive list, telling him: "You no longer have your subordinates' trust." All the while, French leadership lacked the political wherewithal to take action against Nivelle himself.

### German forces fight back

The French efforts hadn't yielded a breakthrough, but they had successfully advanced well into the German defences. Ludendorff and Crown Prince Wilhelm were anxious to push the French back before they could consolidate their gains and fortify their positions. German troops, exhausted by over a fortnight of gritty defence, counter-attacked resolutely under cover of darkness. They twice tried to retake territory between Vauxaillon in the west and Craonne in the centre over two nights between 6-8 May. Further efforts were made near Craonne and



*Louis de Cazenave, a French veteran who was 20 years old during the Nivelle Offensive: "I left with a gun, I came back as a pacifist."*



*The ruins of Craonne, a village completely destroyed by heavy artillery bombardments during the attack*

the Plateau de Californie on 8/9 May. These counter-offensives continued until 11 May, but were all repulsed, with small French gains in some sectors. As the weather improved, the French Air Service was finally able to resume operations and a deluge of bombs replaced the rain that had been falling on the attacking German infantry. After a week's break, the German counter-offensive sparked back into life on 16 May, beginning in the West near Laffaux before shifting back to Craonne and the Plateau de Californie until 21 May. Once more, these attacks were smashed by artillery and machine gun fire, with a further 1,350 German prisoners captured.

The German forces regrouped to reconsider their plan of attack, eventually beginning the Battle of the Observatories as darkness fell on 23 May. Lasting until 3 June, the German

troops made it into their former defences multiple times, including at salients on both sides of Cerny and Laffaux to the west. But ironically, defence in depth began to work against them – they couldn't root out the French from the German-built network of communications trenches and were repeatedly pushed back. While the French defenders were now in range of German artillery, they were safely nestled among well-built German defences. The Battle of the Observatories reached its climactic end with a last assault on the Plateau de Californie and at the Western Vauclerc Plateau on 2/3 June. Wave upon wave of German troops, armed with flamethrowers, advanced shoulder to shoulder. But even this unprecedented and horrific show of force wasn't enough to dislodge the French and Ludendorff called off the counter-offensive.

*Men of the 370th French Infantry Regiment eat soup in a moment of downtime during the Nivelle Offensive*





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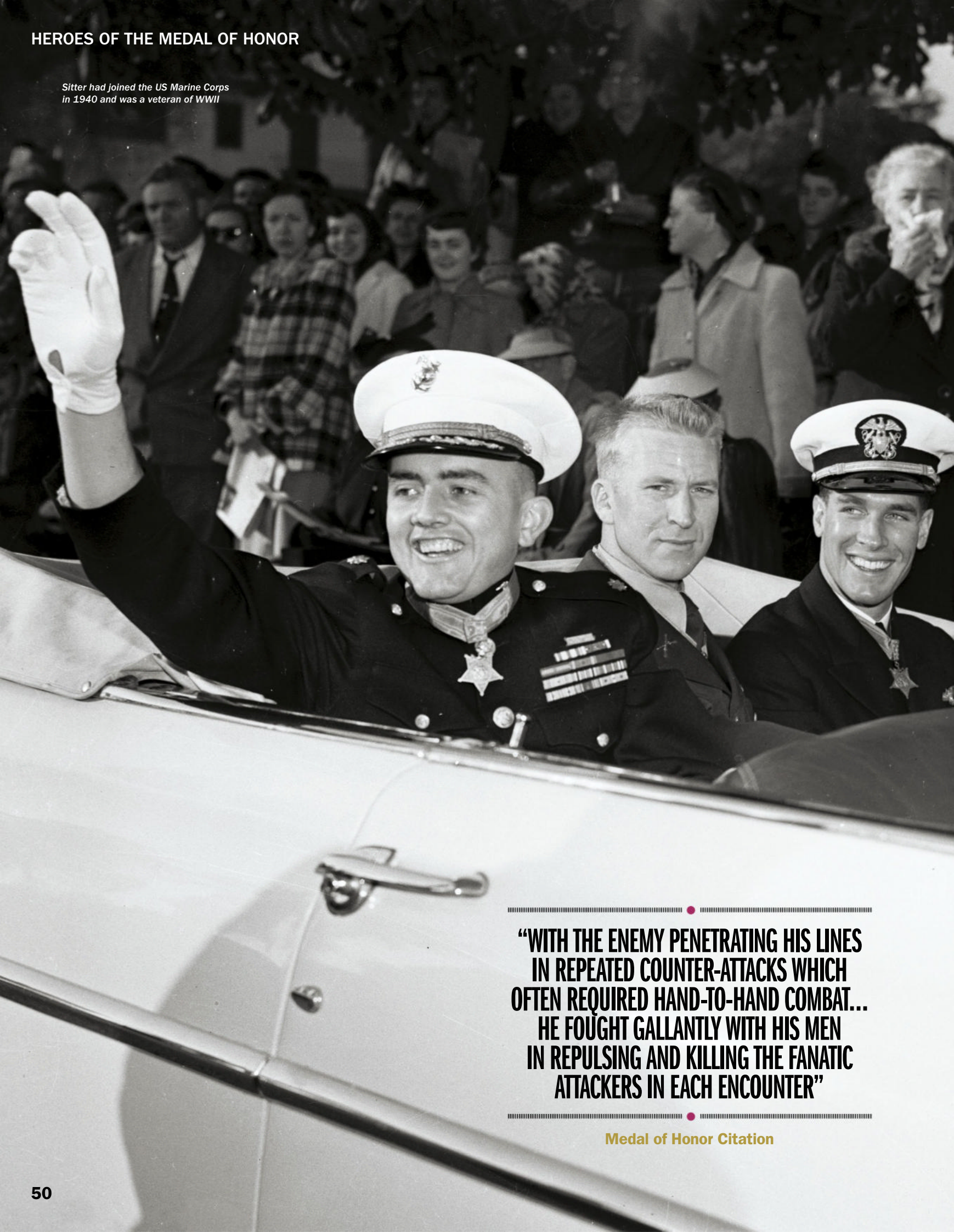


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## HEROES OF THE MEDAL OF HONOR

*Sitter had joined the US Marine Corps  
in 1940 and was a veteran of WWII*



**"WITH THE ENEMY PENETRATING HIS LINES  
IN REPEATED COUNTER-ATTACKS WHICH  
OFTEN REQUIRED HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT...  
HE FOUGHT GALLANTLY WITH HIS MEN  
IN REPULSING AND KILLING THE FANATIC  
ATTACKERS IN EACH ENCOUNTER"**

**Medal of Honor Citation**





## Heroes of the Medal of Honor

# CARL SITTER

During the epic defensive stand at the Chosin Reservoir in the winter of 1950, this captain earned his country's highest honour fighting against Chinese Army troops

WORDS MICHAEL E HASKEW

**T**he situation was desperate. Amid the harshest winter in a century on the Korean peninsula, the US 1st Marine Division was holding the line against more than 120,000 troops of the Chinese Army in a thinly held perimeter at the Chosin Reservoir.

The Chinese had warned that they would intervene in the Korean War to stem the tide of United Nations forces that approached their boundary with North Korea at the River Yalu. When they struck, the Chinese sent UN forces reeling. Now the defenders at the Chosin were suffering from the sub-zero temperatures and fighting for their lives against overwhelming odds.

Captain Carl L Sitter was already a combat veteran. He had joined the US Marine Corps at the age of 18 in 1940, served eight months in Iceland, and then transferred to the Wallis Islands as a corporal after the US joined the Second World War. He received a field commission as a 2nd lieutenant and fought during the campaigns against the Japanese at Eniwetok in the Marshall Islands and Guam in the Marianas. He sustained a serious leg wound on Guam but refused to be evacuated, remaining in command of his platoon for three more days until a second wound forced his evacuation.

For heroism under fire at Guam, he received the Silver Star, and the citation read in part: "Lieutenant Sitter, leading his platoon into combat under the most adverse conditions, constantly subjected himself to intense enemy

rifle, machine gun and mortar fire, without regard for his personal safety, so that he could personally direct the fire and tactical disposition of his troops."

In August 1950, just weeks after the outbreak of the Korean War, the 1st Marine Division deployed. Sitter participated in the surprise landing at Inchon in September, which temporarily turned the tide of the conflict in

favour of the UN forces under the command of General Douglas MacArthur. But the Chinese intervention changed the character of the war. The Marines were on the defensive, and Sitter's Company G, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, was in the thick of the fighting.

On the night of 27 November, approximately 120,000 Chinese troops attacked across the length of the UN perimeter at the Chosin, intent on annihilating the 1st Marine Division and other units fighting under the UN banner. For the next 13 days a savage battle raged. Near the southern tip of the reservoir at Hagaru-ri, every available soldier and Marine from clerks to cooks had been pressed into service as a rifleman, and key high ground known as East Hill had to be wrested from the enemy. Repeated attacks had failed, and reinforcements would have to be committed to the job.

Those critical reinforcements came in the form of Task Force Drysdale. Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Donald Drysdale, the unit consisted of his No 41 Royal Marine Commando, 250-strong, supported by 270 Marines of Sitter's George Company with 150 trucks and other vehicles and two dozen precious tanks. On the morning of 29 November, Task Force Drysdale began fighting its way from Koto-ri toward Hagaru-ri. Drysdale and Sitter weighed their options. The fastest route was along the MSR (Main Supply Route), a narrow corridor that stretched 78 miles (126km) from Yudam-ni in the northwest to the Sea of Japan. The Marines and Commandos climbed aboard the trucks, and the tanks took the lead.



**Above:** Sitter received the Medal of Honor during the Korean War, one of his many decorations





US Marines fire at Chinese soldiers during the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir

Chinese troops fired steadily from houses along the right side of the roadway, and casualties mounted. The 12-mile (19km) trek to Hagaru-ri took an agonising 12 hours. Sitter's Jeep was blasted and his driver killed, but miraculously the captain survived. A short time later, Drysdale was seriously wounded and command of the entire column fell to Sitter. The Chinese had cut the MSR in several places, and the reinforcements for East Hill were steadily battered as they fought their way through multiple enemy roadblocks.

When Sitter's task force reached Hagaru-ri, only 160 of his original complement of Marines could still carry a rifle, while the Royal Marine Commandos had lost half their number. The Marines rested in perimeter reserve during the night, but with the morning the fight for East Hill resumed in earnest. For the next 36 hours, George Company was embroiled in vicious combat.

Sitter sent his 1st and 2nd platoons through exhausted troops along the slope and ordered them to pivot to the left, to hit the high ground, though progress was slow. Snow and ice hampered movements, while heavy Chinese fire stymied two attempts to retake East Hill. Attacks on the high ground resumed, and Sitter was wounded but refused to evacuate as his command occupied portions of the high ground. Temperatures plunged to -60°F (-51°C) and the

**“CARL L SITTER, A FORMER COLONEL IN THE UNITED STATES MARINES... WON THE MEDAL OF HONOR FOR BRAVERY AND VALIANT LEADERSHIP DURING 36 HOURS OF HELLISH HAND-TO-HAND FIGHTING IN KOREA”**

*The New York Times*

Marines dug in as darkness fell, fully expecting a Chinese counter-attack.

Three bugle calls rang out in the night, and at 11:30pm the Chinese launched the first of a series of determined assaults against neighbouring Item Company. George Company soon came under attack as well. Small-arms

fire and mortar shells rained down on the Marine positions, but Sitter calmly moved among his men, some of them replacements that were hastily sent to frontline positions, steadying and encouraging them to fight on.

The left flank of George Company was bent backward as both the 1st and 3rd platoons were forced to give ground. Marine artillery thundered in support of the beleaguered defenders, but by 1am the Chinese were exerting tremendous pressure on the dwindling number of Marines under Sitter's command. Here and there, the enemy actually penetrated the defensive line, and the combat was hand-to-hand. One communist thrust actually reached Sitter's command post. The Chinese tossed hand grenades, but they were gunned down, even as the captain sustained a second and third wound.

George Company suffered 60 men killed or wounded in action on 30 November, but No 41 Royal Marine Commando had secured its hard-pressed left flank and the Chinese attacks melted away. The Marines and Commandos counter-attacked with the dawn of 1 December, regaining the lost ground and keeping a tenuous hold on portions of East Hill. Although George Company and the adjacent units had suffered mightily, the Chinese had been severely mauled and lacked the immediate troop strength to mount another attack. Prisoners confirmed





*Marines of the 1st Division accompanied by an M46 Patton tank trudge through the snow at Chosin Reservoir*

**HISTORY OF WAR  
MEDAL  
OF HONOR  
HEROES  
IS ON SALE NOW**



that most of a Chinese division had been rendered ineffective in the heavy fighting, while ammunition and other supplies were depleted. At least 1,500 Chinese soldiers lay dead around the Marine foxholes, and from 28 November to 5 December, estimated communist casualties totalled more than 5,000.

George Company and the other UN units engaged at East Hill managed to hold their ground for another four days, a crucial interval in the eventual breakout and withdrawal of UN forces to Hungnam.

Sitter was finally evacuated. Recovering from wounds to his face, arms and chest, he returned to the United States in February 1951. At the White House on 29 October 1951, President Harry S Truman presented the Medal of Honor to Sitter in a joint ceremony

with Major Reginald Myers, commander of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, who was also recognised for valour in the November 1950 fighting around Hagaru-ri.

Sitter's Medal of Honor citation recounted: "Captain Sitter visited each foxhole and gun position, coolly deploying and integrating reinforcing units consisting of personnel unfamiliar with infantry tactics into a coordinated combat team, and instilling in every man the will and determination to hold his position at all costs."

For Sitter, there had been no thought of a medal during the desperate combat at East Hill. "I was thinking about getting the mission accomplished and keeping myself from getting shot," he said. "Winning a medal was the furthest thing from my mind. You don't have

time to think about yourself; you have everyone else under your command to think about."

After 30 years in the Marine Corps, Sitter retired from active duty in 1970 with the rank of colonel. Along the way, he served as a battalion executive officer with the 2nd Marine Division; regimental training officer for the 6th Marines, 2nd Division; instructor with the 11th Infantry Battalion, Marine Corps Reserve; and Marine representative to the director, Naval Security Group, US Naval Forces, Europe, stationed in London; along with numerous other command positions. In addition to the Medal of Honor and Silver Star, his decorations include the Legion of Merit, Purple Heart with three gold stars, two Presidential Unit Citations and many campaign awards.

Sitter later worked for the Virginia Department of Social Services and retired from that role in 1985. He died at the age of 77 in Richmond, Virginia, on 4 April 2000. Just a month earlier, he had received a degree from the Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Richmond with the intent to enter the Christian ministry.

Years after the brutal fight for East Hill, Sitter remembered that he felt as though he had been protected by an invisible shield. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Images: Alamy, Getty

*A wounded US Marine is evacuated from the Chosin Reservoir in the winter of 1950*





# KOREA

## CRUCIBLE OF MODERN WAR

For almost four years the peninsula was host to a conflict fought unlike any previous war, with largely WWII-era arms, armour and tactics gradually giving way to new weapons and strategies

WORDS HENRIK JANSSON



The typical terrain of the Korean peninsula: rolling hills and steep valleys. US soldiers man an M1919A4 Browning machine gun, while on the ground lies an M2 Carbine



**H**istory shows that when conducting consecutive wars, military leaders fight the 'next' war with doctrine, equipment and tactics stemming from the previous. If it worked last time, the prevailing wisdom has been that it should work now. Training and tactics take a long time to change, and with most armed forces the rate of change is slow. A prime example of this is the Second World War where the frontlines were – for the most part – clearly defined and continuous, without gaps or separation between defending units. Commanders advanced their troops into enemy territory carefully, safe in the knowledge their enemy was predominantly in front of them. In the next major conflict, the Korean War (1950-53), these conditions would be turned on their head. But why? The answer, in part, is terrain, in part resources.

### Out with the new, in with the old

The Korean peninsula, then as now, is made up of mountainous terrain with high peaks and low valleys, limiting the use of the large-manoeuvre tactics that had seen such success less than a decade prior. The peninsula's narrow valleys did not lend themselves to large armoured columns because the proximity of steep slopes and sharp peaks left these columns vulnerable – from below and above – to a variety of the latest anti-armour weapons. Equally, the high peaks made it difficult for artillery to hit their targets, as shell trajectories were basically blocked by the mountaintops. Similarly, the air forces had a harder time manoeuvring between the peaks to perform close air support (CAS) to aid the ground forces in their task.

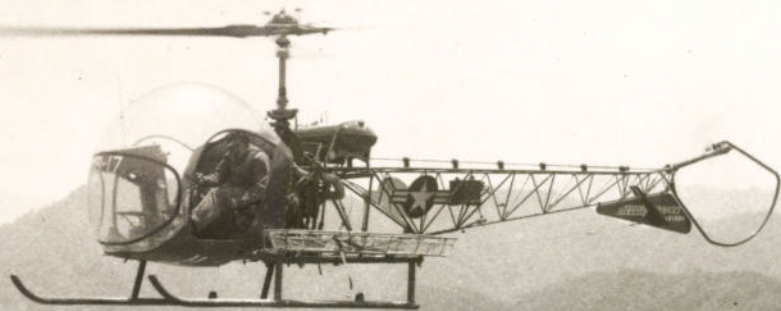
In the beginning of the war, the North Korean and Chinese forces used less artillery, fewer air units and no armour in their offensives, instead relying on infantry, particularly armed with machine guns. They also used the cover of night and the terrain to their advantage, and moved through the American and Allied lines to attack rear echelon troops such as supply units or artillery positions.

These changes in tactics and use of equipment, necessitated by the terrain, destroyed any possibilities of forming a traditional, continuous, linear defence in which a wall of defenders holds a straight line, with the main object of preventing penetration at any point. The mountainous terrain of the Korean peninsula and the preference to use infantry in quite large volumes gave the effect of a crenellated line, with separate garrisons operating hedgehog defences and perimeters, which an enemy could attack from all angles. Understanding this fundamental is the start of understanding the unique conditions under which the Korean War was fought.

Beyond tactical capabilities, at the start of the war US ground forces were faced with a unique conundrum. Their modernised, heavy battlefield equipment was rendered

**“FOR THE MOST PART THE EQUIPMENT AND MACHINERY AVAILABLE FOR THE GROUND FORCES REMAINED UNCHANGED FROM LEGACY SECOND WORLD WAR STOCK”**

The Bell H-13 Sioux was a small, agile helicopter used for evacuating wounded soldiers



US soldiers armed with the older weapons: an M1 Garand in the background and BAR M1918A2 in the foreground. These two weapons, with well over 30 years of service, proved to be the infantry's best small-calibre firearm



Firing the recoilless M20 was a loud experience! Capable of effective and accurate fire at distances up to 3,280ft (1,000m), the rifle was a good supplement to artillery barrages for the US infantry



US soldiers in combat in the Yangu area, July 1951. The sitting soldier is firing an M2 Carbine, a weapon that proved to be more trouble than it was worth



*F-84E Thunderjets from 27th Fighter Escort Wing above Korea in 1951. The Thunderjet F-84 came to Korea in late-1950 and was used primarily for ground-attack, where it proved to be quite effective*



almost ineffective by the rough terrain, meaning more reliance on the infantry. However, the men on the ground were armed with weapons and equipment either entirely new or over 30 years old.

Between 1945 and 1950, US military spending as a whole had been reduced by a factor of almost ten, meaning that for the most part the equipment and machinery available for the ground forces remained unchanged from legacy Second World War stock. The M1 Garand still served as the US Army's main battle rifle, together with M1 Carbines, M1919A4 machine guns and even the old and trusted BAR M1918A2. By 1945 recoilless rifles – designated M18 in 2.2in (57mm) and M20 in 3in (75mm) – had been issued, but were not used in great numbers.

In the air, there had been both development and stagnation. The US entered the war primarily with piston-drive planes dating back to the 1940s, and even its jet-powered F-80 Shooting Stars were rapidly becoming

obsolete. Nonetheless, Korea saw history's first jet-on-jet engagements, with the F-86 Sabre facing off against the MiG-15. Another innovation was the use of helicopters on the frontline, which in the rough terrain proved to be a lifesaver for many wounded troops. By the end of the war Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR), where small helicopters located and collected downed pilots, was an established and critical capability of the US air forces.

**“INEXPERIENCED SOLDIERS BLEW ALL THEIR AMMO WHILE IN AUTOMATIC MODE, LEAVING THEM WITH EMPTY WEAPONS WHEN THE ENEMY CLOSED IN ON THEIR POSITION”**

*The M18 recoilless rifle could be fired handheld, as shown here. With a 2.2in (57mm) projectile and roughly half the range to that of a 3in (75mm), the M18 was less effective, but at 44lb (20kg) it was easier to carry*







The F-86 Sabre with its swept wings was the one plane that could match the MiG-15. Its main armament of six .50-calibre machine guns was, however, inferior to the MiG's automatic cannons in 0.9in (23mm) and 1.5in (37mm)

### New Carbines, new problems

The M1 Carbine dated to the Second World War and was more of a side arm for non-riflemen, with a 15-round magazine and semi-automatic capability. By the 1950s the Carbine had been made fully automatic, with a 30-round magazine. This was designated the M2.

The problem with the now fully automatic weapon was that it became very sensitive to dust and ice. It could require anywhere between 5-20 'warm-up' shots before it fired on fully automatic. The magazines tended to corrode and bring dirt and fouling into the weapon, preventing it from working. After the fighting in the Chosin Reservoir in 1950, the 8th Army's infantry units and the 1st Marine Corps division wanted the Carbine replaced. Moreover, when the Carbine did work, inexperienced soldiers frequently blew all their ammo while in automatic mode, leaving them with empty weapons when the enemy closed in on their position.

There was, however, one iteration of the Carbine that proved useful during the night, and that was the M3. It was an M2 Carbine with an attached M3 infrared (IR) sniper scope and IR lamp together with a heavy battery pack intended to be worn on the soldier's webbing. This gave the soldiers in the Korean night a way to combat the nighttime attacks that were favoured by the North Korean and Chinese troops. This rifle represents a bridge to the modern night-vision devices of today and worked well in Korea.

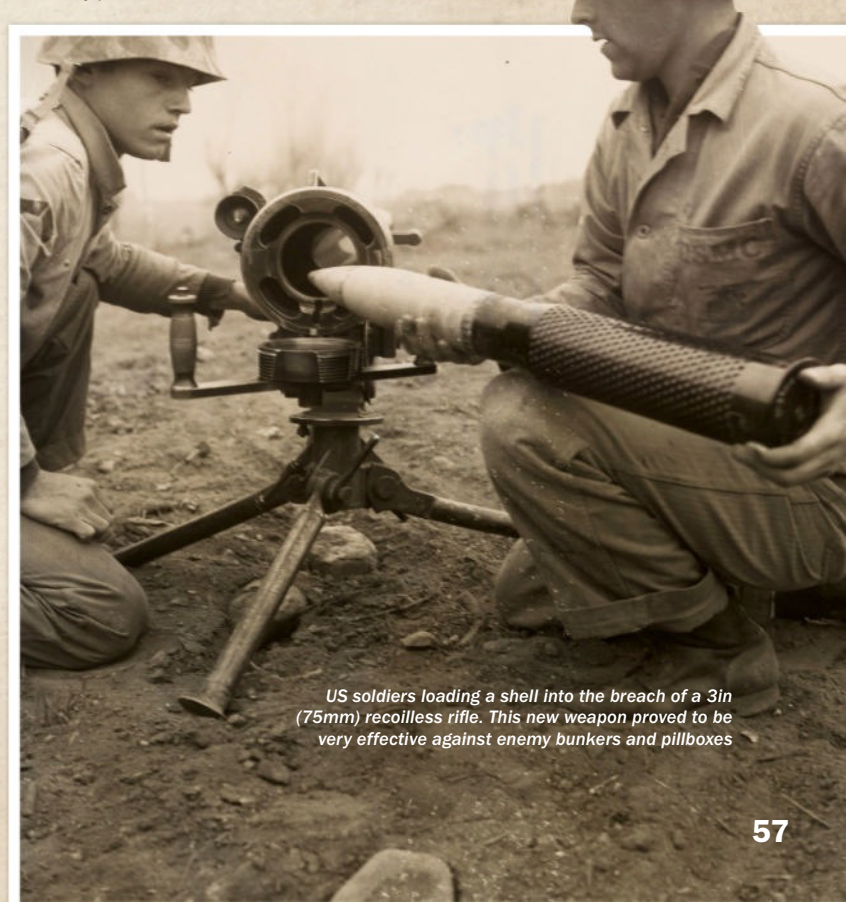
### Oldies but goldies

During long and intense fire fights, in which large waves of soldiers attacked US defenders, the M1 Garand was consistently the weapon that lasted throughout the fight. A Garand fired only in semi-automatic mode and each soldier was typically issued about 100 rounds in eight-round clips. Often, at the end of a fire fight, when all other ammunition and ordnance was expended, those soldiers with M1 Garands still had ammunition left, and proved to be the winning factor. In the freezing climate of the Korean peninsula, the action of the Garand rifle also proved to be the most resilient to 'frost lock', and it kept working even in the harsh conditions just above or below freezing point, where frost lock is most prominent.

The other old favourite that proved itself during the Korean War was the BAR 1918A2. This fully automatic rifle hailing from the First World War was a .30-06 calibre, loaded with 20-round magazines and equipped with a bipod. The BAR turned out to be a good fire-base for squads and often won the day. There were two major reasons for this success: one was the steep slopes of the mountains that limited the field of fire for other machine guns; the other was



Above: Marines walking single-file up the side of a hill. This was common in the Korean War, which meant when the front of the column was engaged, there were fewer weapons that could be brought to bear on the enemy position



US soldiers loading a shell into the breach of a 3in (75mm) recoilless rifle. This new weapon proved to be very effective against enemy bunkers and pillboxes





A Grumman F9F-2 Panther on the elevator of aircraft carrier USS Franklin D Roosevelt (CVB-42). This plane was the US Navy's main jet-driven fighter



The steep terrain was a huge challenge for US tanks, and they were often used as static artillery pieces. Here, US Marine Corps M46 Pattons fire at enemy positions



The main armament of the Shooting Star were six .50 calibre Browning machine guns, which here are being loaded with belted ammunition

that the skilled and daring Chinese machine gunners tended to move very close to the US lines before setting up position and opening fire – when US forces tried to counter this, they were obvious in their movement and took many casualties. On the other hand, the BAR gunner, often a levelheaded, cool soldier with experience and low tendency to panic fire, was less obvious than the machine gun crew and could set up a solid base of fire to counter not only Chinese machine gunners but also hidden snipers.

The conclusion that was drawn from After Action Reports and similar evaluations was to double the number of BARs in the units at the expense of M1 Garands.

### **Recoilless rifles: M18 and M20**

The recoilless rifles were introduced to give the infantry heavier weapons, similar to artillery, along with the ability to fire directly into a target. These weapons were introduced in the last months of the Second World War and were designated M18 and M20.

The M18 could be fired from the shoulder or a tripod and fired a 2.2in (57mm) grenade at velocity of approximately 1,215ft/s (370m/s) with great accuracy out to 1,640ft (500m). The M20 was fired from a tripod and used a 3in (75mm) shell at 100ft/s (30m/s) and could hit targets at close to 3,280ft (1,000m). These two weapons proved to be invaluable to the infantry in Korea.

The Chinese favoured constructing bunkers into ridgelines, reinforced with thick logs. These emplacements could only be knocked out by a direct hit from artillery, however the mountainous Korean peaks often allowed only for indirect artillery fire, leaving the bunkers intact and able to take a heavy toll on any attacking infantry.

This is where the recoilless M18 and M20 proved their worth – they gave the infantry a capability to fire directly into these fortified positions and destroy them, without artillery. They were often used to fire from one hillside, across the valley into the opposite hillside. The M18 could at 44lb (20kg) be carried by one man, but the M20, which weighed in at



A flight of four F-86 Sabres from 51st Fighter Wing on patrol above MiG Alley. The F-86 held the upper hand over the MiGs



## “THE RECOILLESS M18 AND M20 PROVED THEIR WORTH – THEY GAVE THE INFANTRY A CAPABILITY TO FIRE DIRECTLY INTO FORTIFIED POSITIONS AND DESTROY THEM, WITHOUT USING ARTILLERY”

104lb (47kg) needed some mode of transportation or several soldiers to carry it.

In several encounters, accurate 3in (75mm) fire from a single M20 turned the entire fight around against a variety of targets such as pillboxes, gun emplacements, machine guns and mortar crews.

### Battle for the air

The air war of Korea was a turning point for fixed-wing aircraft and saw the emergence of the jet age. In 1950 the newly formed US Air Force had around 550 aircraft in the area, comprised of B-29 Superfortress bombers, F-82 twin Mustang night fighters and B-26 Invaders for attack. They also had some jet planes in the shape of the F-80 Shooting Star but, although jet-driven, this straight-winged plane was rapidly becoming obsolete. In addition, on aircraft carriers there were two squadrons of Grumman F9F-2 Panthers, a straight-winged navy jet plane, together with one squadron of piston-driven Vought F4U Corsairs.

North Korean air power consisted mainly of a small number of piston-driven Yaks but they were soon supplemented with modern, jet-driven, swept-wing MiG-15s from China.

The conflict in the air showed the vast difference between piston-driven and jet-driven aircraft, and later between straight-winged jet-driven planes and the swept-wing type. However, the phrase “it’s not the plane, it’s the pilot” is valid, as demonstrated by US Navy pilot Lieutenant

Royce Williams. He faced off against seven Soviet MiG-15s in November of 1952 and shot down four of them before returning to the USS Oriskany with some 250 bullet holes and cannon hits in his plane.

Williams’ experience was, however, the exception to the rule – the undisputed lord of the skies in the beginning of the Korean War was the MiG-15. In terms of design, the MiG’s swept back wings enabled reduced airflow over the airframe. This in turn meant that there was far less negative effects of that airflow at greater heights and speeds, so the MiG was far more responsive and controllable at these extremes, compared with its contemporaries.

In November 1950, after the arrival of MiG-15s, the US deployed F-84 Thunderjets in the attack role and F-86 Sabres in the fighter role. In the area known as ‘MiG Alley’, where the Yalu River meets the Yellow Sea, MiG-15s patrolled regularly and on 22 December 1950 the first real face-off between the F-86 and the MiG-15s resulted in one F-86 and two MiGs being shot down. On paper the MiG-15 was superior to the F-86 Sabre; however, the kill ratio, although not 10:1 as is sometimes claimed but still in favour of the US pilots, proved that training and pilot skill was vital.

The helicopters used in Korea were a significant change in warfare as well. The ability to swiftly airlift troops into an area and deploy them was a gamechanger. However, the most important role of the helicopters turned out to be evacuation of the wounded. Here, the small and nimble Bell H-13 Sioux was able to quickly move into the difficult terrain and, with litters on each side, airlift two wounded soldiers to a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH). One pilot was credited with evacuating over 900 wounded soldiers during the war.

The Sikorsky H-5 was also used for CSAR and was followed by the Sikorsky H-19 Chicksaw that saw extended use in Korea, particularly by the Marines. Capable of lifting 10 soldiers at a time and many supplies, it proved invaluable to the Marines and is the real bridge to the modern use of helicopters in wars.

*US infantry in position on a rocky hillside, armed with M1 Garands, M2 Carbines and an old water-cooled M1917 machine gun*





# T-26

## MAIN GUN

The 1.8in (45mm) gun was powerful when introduced and though outclassed by 1941, was still good enough to face Japanese tanks in 1945.

The most widely produced light tank of the 1930s fought in the Spanish Civil War, Sino-Japanese War, the Winter War and on WWII's Eastern Front

WORDS DUNCAN EVANS

**B**y the dawn of the 1930s, the Soviet Union's tank force was so out of date that the communists had to look overseas for ideas. The result was an order for 15 British Vickers 6t Model A light tanks. The first deliveries were made in the autumn of 1930, with the rest in 1931-32, by which point the Bolshevik Factory, Leningrad, had its own version ready to roll. The new tank, called the T-26 and identified by the year design improvements were authorised, started with Model 1931 and Model 1932.

These featured twin turrets, just like the British tank, but had an observation slit and a firing port for a 0.3in (7.62mm) DT machine gun in the 1931 version, replaced by a 1.5in (37mm) main gun in 1932. The engine was originally a poor copy of the Armstrong Siddeley engine in the British tank but did improve from 1934.

It was the Model 1933 version that, after an initial production run of twin-turreted tanks, changed to the more modern, single-turret design, armed with the new 1.8in (45mm) tank gun Model 1932.

## T-26 MODEL 1939

One of the last T-26s, which continued to be built until 1941 when production was stopped in favour of the T-34.

*Below: T-26 Model 1933 with the cylindrical 'clothesline' aerial signifying the radio of a command rank*



Image: Alamy





**NEW TURRET**

Model 1938 saw the introduction of a new-style, cylindrical turret, with straight sides on the under-turret box, replaced by sloping sides on Model 1939.

From there the T-26 saw regular updates to equipment, armour and the engine. It was sent to fight in the Spanish Civil War, destroyed the Japanese at Khalkhin Gol in 1939 and was used to invade Finland in the Winter War. However, when the Germans launched Operation Barbarossa, it was hopelessly outgunned by the Panzer III and IV. The remaining T-26s were relegated to defensive duties around Leningrad and Moscow, but it had a final hurrah in 1945 when comprising 25 percent of the tank force used to crush the Japanese Kwantung Army in Manchuria.

**REDESIGNED HULL**

The Model 1939 had a wider superstructure to enable the use of sloping armour plates, making it hard to knock out.

**MORE AMMO**

The larger hull meant that much more ammunition could be held inside the Model 1939 compared to earlier versions (185 rounds versus 107).

## SOVIET T-26 MODEL 1939 LIGHT TANK (T-26-1)

COMMISSIONED	1931
ORIGIN	BRITISH VICKERS 6T MODEL A
LENGTH	4.8M
RANGE	220-240KM (ROAD) 130-140KM (OFF-ROAD)
ENGINE	95HP GAZ T-26, 6.6-LITRE, 4-CYLINDER PETROL
CREW	3
ARMOUR	15-20MM FRONT 15MM SIDE AND REAR
PRIMARY WEAPON	45MM TANK GUN MODEL 1932
SECONDARY WEAPON	TWO X 7.62MM MACHINE GUNS

**“IT WAS SENT TO FIGHT IN  
THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR,  
DESTROYED THE JAPANESE  
AT KHALKHIN GOL IN 1939  
AND WAS USED TO INVADE  
FINLAND IN THE WINTER WAR”**



## ARMAMENT

The Model 1931 and Model 1932 tanks had the same twin-turrets as the Vickers design, but used a 0.3in (7.62mm) DT machine gun in one turret and an observation slit in the other. The T-26TU Model 1931 was a command tank and this used a 1.5in (37mm) gun instead. The first half of 1933 saw 576 twin-turret tanks built before production switched to single turrets and a deadly 1.8in (45mm) tank gun Model 1932. In 1936 an additional 0.3in (7.62mm) DT machine gun was added at the rear of the turret and a P-40 mounting was used to house a machine gun for anti-aircraft use. A TOP-1, vertically stabilised, telescopic gun sight was introduced with Model 1937.



## “PRODUCTION SWITCHED TO SINGLE TURRETS AND A DEADLY 1.8IN (45MM) TANK GUN”

*A T-26 Model 1938 destroyed in action against superior German tanks in 1941. Note the rear-facing machine gun*





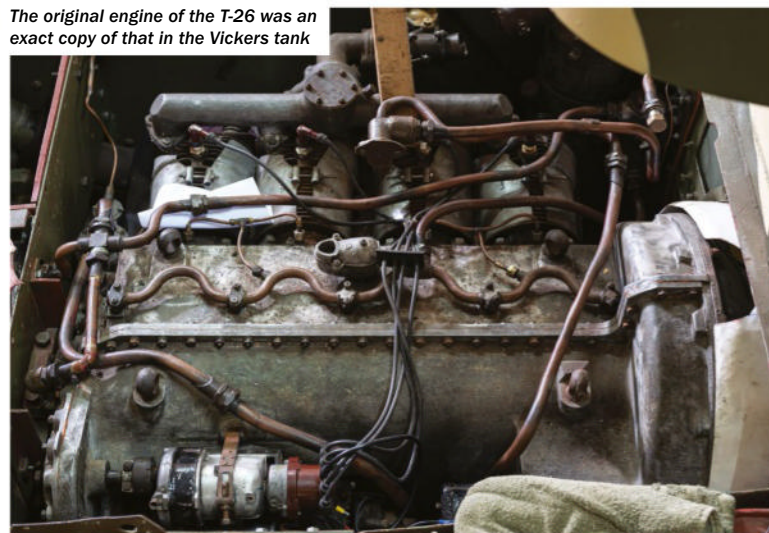


Advancing Finnish soldiers with captured Soviet light tank T-26

## DESIGN

The first Soviet version of the Vickers design, Model 1931, used 0.4in (10mm) average-quality armoured plates riveted to a metal frame, which made it easy to knock out with just concentrated machine gun fire. Models 1932 and 1933 improved matters by incorporating welding into the construction and upgrading to 0.5-0.6in (13-15mm) armour. There was also a larger fuel tank, a simplified oil box and an engine cooling fan to make it more reliable. By 1935 the manufacturing process moved to a completely welded turret and hull, and Model 1937 added the TPU-3 intercom. The last changes to the tank's profile came in 1938 with a conical turret with sloped sides, and with Model 1939 which added extra armour and sloped sides to the under-turret box.

The original engine of the T-26 was an exact copy of that in the Vickers tank



## ENGINE

The original engine in the Model 1931 was a GAZ T-26 90hp, 6.6-litre, four-cylinder petrol engine that was an exact copy of the Armstrong Siddeley engine in the Vickers 6t tank. It was air-cooled but didn't have any kind of speed limiter, which resulted in overheating and breakdowns, especially in hot weather. It also required top-grade petrol, which was hard to come by; cheaper petrol degraded the engine. Top speed was 19.3mph (31.1kp/h) on hard, paved surfaces, 14mph (22.5kp/h) on gravel and just 10mph (16km/h) off-road. Tweaks to the engine improved the output to 93hp with Model 1937 and 95hp with Model 1938.

*The engine compartment was air-cooled, which was simpler than using a water-cooling system, making it cheap to build and maintain*





## INTERIOR

The interior was utilitarian, with the T-26 designed for mass production rather than comfort. The rear-mounted engine featured five gears with the clutch connected to the gearbox and a drive shaft passing through to the front controls. The gear-change level was fitted on top of the gearbox and steering was done through steering clutches and band brakes on the main powered roller wheels. Main gun ammunition was stored vertically around the turret interior. With only three crew members consisting of commander, gunner and driver, the commander usually had to fill in loading the gun or firing it.

*Above: The tank commander and gunner had to squeeze in here to use the TOP-1 telescopic sight, 1.8in (45mm) gun and PT-K panoramic sight*



*The T-26, which was designed for mass-production rather than comfort and survivability*



*In total, 10,268 T-26s were produced, making up the bulk of the Soviet Union's tank forces*

## SERVICE HISTORY

The T-26 first saw combat when Stalin dispatched 300 T-26 and 50 BT-5 tanks to Spain on the side of the Republicans in 1936. The powerful 1.8in (45mm) high-velocity gun made short work of the opposing Panzer I and Italian tankettes, and even though it was susceptible to armour-piercing rounds, the Nationalist forces rarely got close enough use them. In 1939 there was trouble in the Far East, resulting in Georgy Zhukov destroying the Japanese at the Battle of Khalkhin Gol with over 500 T-26 and BT-7s. However, later in 1939, when the Soviet Union





**"BY 1941 IT WAS OUTCLASSSED BY GERMAN PANZER III AND IV TANKS, WHICH RESULTED IN THE LOSS OF TWO-THIRDS OF ALL T-26 TANKS DURING OPERATION BARBAROSSA"**

T-26 tank crews are briefed by their commander, c.1939



invaded Finland in the Winter War, poor tactics and that susceptibility to armour-piercing rounds resulted in large losses. As a result, 1.2-1.6in (30-40mm) of appliqué armour was added to 69 T-26E (the 'E' standing for *ekranirovanny*, meaning 'screened') tanks that proved imperious to the Fins' light anti-tank weapons. By February 1941, when the last T-26 was completed, there were 10,268 models of various configuration which made up most of Soviet tank force. By this point, though, they were outclassed by German Panzer III and IV tanks, which resulted in the loss of two-thirds of all T-26 tanks during Operation Barbarossa.



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# HOME FRONT

## 68 FALSE AUGURIES

Mark Galeotti discusses three victories from Putin's past, and how he misunderstood them



72

Museums and events



74

WWII this month



82

Artefact of War:  
Crimean War VC



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# FALSE AUGURIES

## HOW PUTIN (MIS)UNDERSTOOD HIS VICTORIES

Though Russia's 'strong man' counts a number of grisly triumphs in his past military endeavours, these perceived successes may have misled him when it came to planning the latest and costliest 'special operation'

WORDS MARK GALEOTTI

**F**or all that he can scarcely walk past a tank or a fighter jet without a photo opportunity of him peering out of the cupola or ensconced in the cockpit, Vladimir Putin is no soldier. He did his bare minimum reserve officer training at university, being assigned a technical rank of lieutenant, but abandoned it as soon as he could. He shows little sign of understanding the realities of warfare, from strategy and tactics to the unavoidable necessities of logistics.

This is something even Russian soldiers – and even before the current Ukraine debacle – uncomfortably acknowledge. Once, I was talking to a couple of officers, and once we had got past their inevitable wariness at talking to a Westerner (some drinks helped) it became clear that they had a complex attitude towards their commander-in-chief, at once respecting him as a strong and capable national leader, but at the same time unconvinced he truly understood warfare. In a colourful metaphor, one said: "I wouldn't want a virgin telling me what to do on my wedding night."

The irony is that, for all but three of the 24 years Putin has now directly and indirectly ruled Russia, he has been at war, declared or undeclared, domestic or foreign. Most of these wars were, in one way or another, victories, especially because they were limited in scale and objectives. Nonetheless, it seems clear that the lessons Putin derived from them, sometimes accurate but often deeply mistaken, led him to his fateful decision to invade Ukraine in February 2022, and shaped his thinking as to how that should best be done.

### The Second Chechen War, 1999 – 2009

When Putin first came to power, the challenge was to fight a domestic war with what he had at his disposal, after at least 20 years of catastrophic military decline. The rebellious Chechen people of southern Russia had in

essence fought Moscow to a draw in the First Chechen War (1994-96), and even while still prime minister and president-in-waiting in 1999, Putin was determined to address this challenge. In September 1999, a series of explosions in apartment buildings across Russia killed more than 300 people. The Chechens were blamed, and this was used to justify a renewed campaign. In October, Russian troops crossed the Chechen border, in a war that would be the making of Putin's reputation as a tough, ruthless and indomitable leader. Unlike the previous war, the Second Chechen War was backed by massive force, supported by a comprehensive information campaign to justify its brutal methods, and also drew on Chechens willing to fight for Moscow.

This was an ugly conflict, even by the standards of civil wars. The Chechen capital, Grozny, was flattened. Chechen men were rounded up for infamous 'filtration camps'. The official death toll was 5,200 Russian soldiers and police and over 16,000 rebels, but estimates of the civilian casualties range from 30,000-80,000. Nonetheless, Moscow had demonstrated that it had the will and ability to keep its provinces in line. Most importantly, Putin felt he had proven not just that the Russian bear still had its claws, but that the ruthless use of force worked, and that so long as he kept hostile journalists out and pitched this as simply a policing action against terrorists and jihadists, then his people would be happy and the West would do little



**Right:** Russian officers at a field headquarters near Grozny during the Second Chechen War, December 1999



*Vladimir Putin, pictured here in Sevastopol in April 2000, gradually created a system in which few people dare question his judgement*



PHOTOGRAPH BY GUY AROCH



but complain and wring its hands when Russia presented it with a fait accompli.

### **The Georgian War, 2008**

Chechnya, though, was at least legally part of the Russian Federation. What would happen when Moscow launched an operation abroad? Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili had long been a thorn in Putin's side, with his vehement anti-Russian rhetoric and his eager courtship of NATO. To Putin – at the time technically just the prime minister, not the president, but still the undisputed master of Russia – Georgia needed to be reminded that it was part of Moscow's sphere of interest, not least to provide a warning to other neighbouring states thinking of challenging the self-proclaimed regional hegemon. Two break-away regions of Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, would be the pretext. Saakashvili was provoked into attacking South Ossetia, Moscow denounced this as an act of aggression and invaded, pushing government forces out of the break-away regions.

From Putin's point of view, this was another triumph. His personal *bête noire* Saakashvili was humbled and Georgia's drift towards the West halted. He seemed less than concerned with the details, which were rather more mixed. Of course, Russia was always going to be able to beat tiny Georgia, whose total military amounted to just 30,000 troops, of whom many of the best were serving in the multinational force in Iraq. However, it turned out not to have been as easy as anticipated, with the Russian offensive dogged by blunders. Half its aircraft losses were to friendly fire incidents, for example, and generals found themselves having to borrow journalists' satellite phones to give orders.

That said, this gave then-Defence Minister Serdyukov and his Chief of the General Staff Nikolai Makarov the opportunity finally to force

serious reform on the conservative generals. It was seriously overdue: only 17 percent of the Ground Forces and 3 percent of the Air Force's regiments were combat ready and half the Navy's ships were not seaworthy. The so-called 'New Look' reforms were meant to create more capable, mobile, flexible and professional forces based on smaller brigades and battalion tactical groups rather than the old divisions. This entailed shrinking the total armed forces by 130,000 men, especially by pruning the top-heavy officer corps (one in three were dismissed), while increasing the proportion of volunteer *kontraktniki* to conscripts.

### **Crimea and Syria, 2014-15**

Under Serdyukov and his successor, Sergei Shoigu, real progress was made. However, it was at best partial. In effect, by 2014 Russia had two armies: one which had been quite successfully reformed, largely comprising the special forces and other elite units, and a rump that was still quite some way from the 'New Look' ideal. Nonetheless, this was enough for the seizure of Crimea following Ukraine's 'Revolution of Dignity' at the start of 2014. The Crimean Peninsula was strategically and politically crucial to Putin: home of the Black Sea Fleet and something almost every one of his subjects considered rightly theirs (it had been Russian until 1954). When Kyiv was taken over by a new government keen on getting closer to the West, Putin decided that Crimea ought to be 'returned' and what followed was a textbook military operation. The so-called 'little green men' – Russian special forces – took over the peninsula almost without a shot being fired and it was then annexed.

One would have been hard-pressed to imagine more propitious conditions for such a coup de main: the Ukrainian military was in disarray, the new government was weak,

the West did not want a confrontation, and thousands of Russian troops were already present on the peninsula. It was a genuine triumph, but it was not a true test of the whole Russian military machine. Nonetheless, Putin was to gain an exaggerated sense of Russia's military capabilities, not fully appreciating just how unusual the circumstances were and how far its small scope required the deployment of just the best of the best.

Much the same could be said of the military deployment in Syria from 2015. Faced with the risk that Bashar al-Assad's brutal regime could fall to popular revolt, and also eager to hit back against a West that was trying politically to isolate Russia since its Crimean annexation, Moscow decided on a limited intervention. In September 2015, Russian combat aircraft flew to their new base at Hmeimim in Syria, in the start of an operation that would see the ruthless use of air power, mercenaries and special forces to secure the regime.

### **Lessons learned but misunderstood**

The lessons Putin learned from these conflicts would be crucial in inclining him towards invasion in 2022. As Ukraine increasingly swung towards Europe, Putin – whose skewed notion of Russian history leads him to believe Ukraine is not even a real country – became increasingly determined to return it to Moscow's orbit. Through 2021, Russian forces built up along the border, but he himself appears not to have decided whether or not to invade, and if so whether to try and take the whole country or just the east, where most ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers live. He may well have only made that fateful final decision at the last minute. Even on 21 February, a few days before the invasion, when Putin held a televised meeting with his top security officials, it was clear they did not know his plans.

*A Georgian villager walks past a column of Russian armour, August 2008*

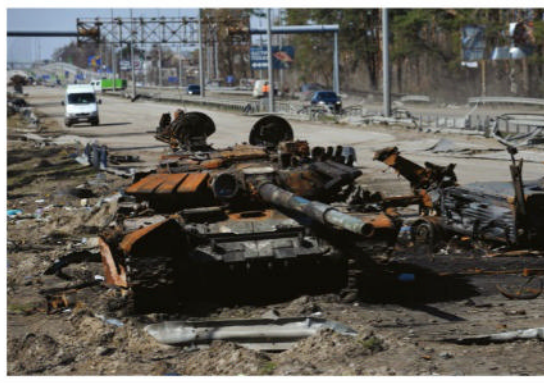


**"TWENTY YEARS OF CONTINUED SPENDING HAD BOUGHT PUTIN AN ARMY WELL SUITED TO BULLYING SMALL NEIGHBOURS, BOMBING UNDEFENDED CITIES, AND RUMBLING THROUGH RED SQUARE IN CAREFULLY CHOREOGRAPHED SPLENDOUR"**





**Above:** Russian special forces without insignia, dubbed 'little green men', seized Crimea in early 2014



**Above:** A destroyed Russian tank on the outskirts of Kyiv after Russian forces were pushed back from the capital, April 2022



**Above:** Putin poses in the cockpit of a strategic bomber, August 2005

The decision, though, was clearly informed by the lessons he felt he had learned from his past wars. Chechnya had, he believed, demonstrated that swift and ruthless use of overwhelming force works, especially so long as he was able to control the narrative. Georgia stood as evidence that the West might huff and puff, but never try and blow his house down. Crimea was the model for how he thought this war would progress, a swift and essentially unopposed coup de main (it's no accident that many of the invading forces were not army but paramilitary National Guard, essentially riot police). Syria, he thought, proved that Russia could win a war without taking heavy losses and despite public indifference, and that the weaknesses highlighted in Georgia had all been fixed.

Of course, he was wrong. Cities such as Mariupol and Bakhmut were levelled, but this did not break Ukrainian resistance. The post-Georgian reforms had, ironically, possibly even undermined Russia's capacity to fight a mass war, geared as they were to generating forces able to deploy in small-scale interventions. Indeed, many of these reforms have been

reversed, with divisions returning to the order of battle. This was never going to be Crimea 2.0, not across a country larger than France, which had spent eight years preparing for this very scenario. While Syria was the most asymmetric of conflicts, where Russian air power was virtually unchallenged and where the enemy was divided, a militarily prepared and unified Ukraine was able to deny air superiority to its enemy.

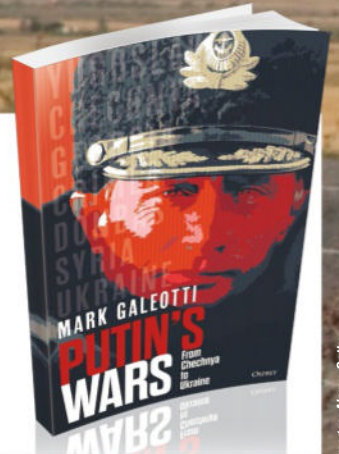
More generally, Putin had failed to learn the deeper lessons of modern war. Twenty years

of continued spending had bought him an army well suited to bullying small neighbours, bombing undefended cities, and rumbling through Red Square in carefully choreographed splendour. Yet he had always prioritised teeth to tail: logistics were under-developed, training and discipline remained weaknesses, and corruption undermined everything from the integrity of the chain of command to procurement. For example, Russian trucks deployed in Ukraine turned out to be fitted with cheap Chinese tyres instead of the heavy all-terrain ones they were meant to have.

These were all issues known to everyone, but to which Putin had wilfully closed his eyes. Just as with the Ukrainians' willingness to fight, or the importance of following Russian doctrine rather than assuming his forces could just roll into a country and impose a new government with scarcely a shot needing to be fired, he made decisions based on ignorance. In so doing he had created a system in which no one could or dared to correct him. This is not just Putin's war, it will in due course be Putin's defeat.



**MARK GALEOTTI IS THE AUTHOR OF PUTIN'S WARS: FROM CHECHNYA TO UKRAINE, PUBLISHED BY OSPREY AND OUT IN PAPERBACK NOW**



Images: Alamy, Getty



# MUSEUMS & EVENTS

A Palmerston Fort gets a much-needed restoration, The Helicopter Museum reflects on 80 years of military history and York Army Museum displays soldiers' art

## Newhaven Fort restoration

**This iconic East Sussex fortress will be closed until early 2025 as it undergoes a comprehensive £7.5 million restoration**

In 1860, Prime Minister Lord Palmerston (Henry John Temple) commissioned the Palmerston Forts after the Royal Navy Commission on the Defence of the United Kingdom shared concerns about the French Navy. The forts became the most costly and extensive system of fixed defences in British peacetime. Commentators named them Palmerston's Follies due to their obsolete guns and doubts over whether the French Navy was actually a threat.

Many of the Palmerston Forts still stand, including Newhaven Fort, the largest defence work in Sussex. It sits on Castle Hill, a cliff overlooking Newhaven Harbour, and has been welcoming visitors since its restoration in the 1980s. However, 160 years after the fort was first built, it needs restoration to prevent exposure to the elements from causing lasting damage.

Newhaven Fort is teaming up with Pilbeam Construction for the £7.5 million restoration project, with funding from Lewes District Council and the Newhaven Town Deal fund. The bulk of the work will involve repairing brickwork and windows,

preventing water penetration, and updating utilities. Newhaven Fort has also planned various updates to excite visitors, who will return in 2025. This includes a battery observation post, which had not previously been open to the public, offering stunning views of the Sussex coastline, as well as new exhibitions and access to gun emplacements. The fort also plans to reopen its Romney Hut, and schools and local community groups will be invited to use this all-year events space.

Johnny Denis, Green Party councillor for Ouse Valley and Ringmer and cabinet member for Arts, Culture, Tourism and Leisure says: "Newhaven Fort is a local and national treasure and I am delighted that work to restore and enhance this popular visitor attraction will be taking place so that more people can enjoy visiting it in the years to come."

The restoration work at Newhaven Fort will continue throughout 2024 and the historic landmark will be back open in early 2025. Keep an eye on the Newhaven Fort website (see below) for updates on the ongoing work and announcements regarding the museum's reopening next year.



**Above:** The team organising the restoration, including Duncan Kerr (far-left), from Wave Active, and Andrew Arrow, from Pilbeam Construction (far right)



**Above:** Newhaven Fort has been a prominent feature of Newhaven Harbour since 1871

*A sculpture dedicated to those who fought in the Second World War, located at Newhaven Fort*



For more information visit: [www.newhavenfort.org.uk](http://www.newhavenfort.org.uk)



# Creativity from Conflict

**Discover York Army Museum's range of creative works brought to life, from watercolours to pocketbook sketches**

In a chaotic world of bombardment and sniper fire, death lies around every corner for soldiers deployed in active conflict and they can feel reduced to a cog in a war machine. Soldier artists have been a constant phenomenon across war zones, helping troops express their individuality and reflect on the horrors they have witnessed.

The Creativity from Conflict exhibition sheds light on the work of soldier artists from carefully curated pieces chosen from the collections of the Royal Dragoon Guards and the Royal Yorkshire Regiment. The exhibition features stunning 19th and 20th century paintings by Yorkshire soldiers. These artworks were sketched quickly in situ before being filled in with colour once the action had settled down.

Alongside paintings and sketches, Creativity in Conflict also features artefacts made by soldiers using whatever they could get their hands on. Scrap metal, bone, stone and textiles were fashioned into bespoke ashtrays, knives, shell cases and embroidered cushions.

Creativity from Conflict is a unique window into how Yorkshire soldiers have processed their trauma from war. York Army Museum's exhibition pairs the artwork with stories of the soldiers who made them, helping visitors understand how the artefacts reflect the troops' personalities and experiences of war. This temporary exhibition will remain open until the end of April 2024.

For more information visit: [www.yorkarmymuseum.co.uk](http://www.yorkarmymuseum.co.uk)



*Above: An artillery shell engraved with the symbolism of a West Yorkshire unit*



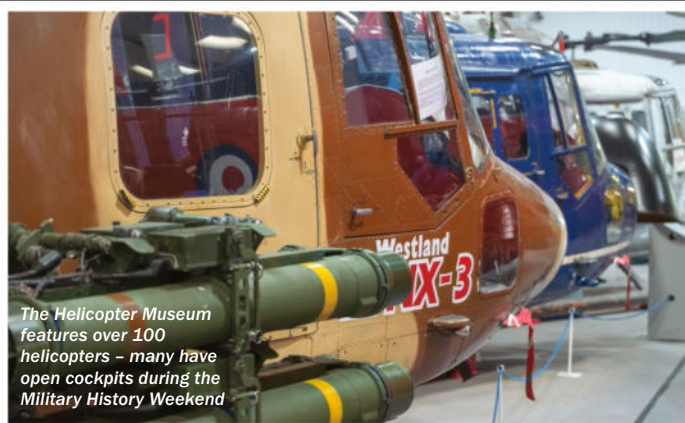
*One of three watercolours by Major PR Nightingale documenting the East Yorkshire Regiment's WWII service in Burma*

Images © York Army Museum

## Military History Weekend

**See over 80 years of fascinating military aviation history brought to life at The Helicopter Museum, featuring reenactments, living history camps and live-firing demonstrations**

The Helicopter Museum in Weston-super-Mare is renowned for its leading collection of military and civilian helicopters, including a Huey that saw action in Vietnam and a Russian Hind gunship. However, the museum goes beyond helicopters at its Military History Weekend. The main attraction is located around the museum's 1940's Airfield Control Tower, where visitors can find a Second World War military encampment. It features a German command headquarters, minefields, a mobile medical station and a vast range of vintage military vehicles.



*The Helicopter Museum features over 100 helicopters – many have open cockpits during the Military History Weekend*

Meanwhile, visitors can get an experience of other conflicts from the last 80 years from the dozens of English, American and German re-enactors. During the weekend, they will hold reenactments of battles from the Vietnam War and Falklands War, tank driving demonstrations and live-firing sessions. Another highlight of the week is the veterans' parade, which commemorates those who have lost their lives in war.

The Military History Weekend – which is taking place across 20 and 21 April 2024 – is also an essential event for helicopter enthusiasts as this is an 'open cockpit access' weekend. Visitors can sit in real helicopters, don pilots' helmets and have all the controls explained by knowledgeable guides.

Attending the event is also a chance to support The Helicopter Museum's partner charities. This year's Military History Weekend is in aid of the Royal Air Forces Association, Royal British Legion, Blesma and SAMA. Despite the range of attractions on offer, The Helicopter Museum only charges its standard admission prices for the Military History Weekend, with family tickets available.



*Re-enactors demonstrate with a machine gun at Military History Weekend 2023*

For more information visit: [www.helimuseum.com](http://www.helimuseum.com)

Images: © Alamy, The Helicopter Museum




**WWII THIS MONTH...**

# APRIL 1944

To commemorate 80 years since the Second World War, History of War will be taking a look at some of the key events taking place during each month of the conflict



Auschwitz photographed from the air by 60 Squadron South African Air Force



## FIRST AUSCHWITZ AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS

On 4 April 1944, a reconnaissance de Havilland Mosquito flew from Foggia, Italy, to photograph the IG Farben fuel and rubber factory at Monowitz, located 2.5 miles (4km) from Auschwitz-Birkenau. It was common practice to keep the camera rolling slightly before and after the target to ensure complete coverage, so the camera accidentally picked up the camp. Three further photographs were taken by a second sortie on 31 May 1944, revealing Birkenau. The bombing of the Monowitz factory was delayed until 20 August, and reconnaissance sorties continued afterwards to assess the damage. This photographic material was unearthed in 1978 by two CIA photo analysts.





## FRENCH COLLABORATORS' DEMONSTRATION

A beleaguered Legion of French Volunteers Against Bolshevism (LVF) held a last-ditch show of force at the Velodrome d'Hiver, which had been the site of the round-up of over 13,000 Jews in July 1942. At this time the LVF, a unit of the Wehrmacht, was entering its final days. Numbers were dwindling rapidly under increased partisan pressure. Twenty-two had been killed in March 1944 alone and the LVF was forced to withdraw to Germany by June 1944.

*Left: Thousands of members of the LVF, which was founded in August 1941, meet at a demonstration in Paris*



## FIRST LADY VISITS CANAL ZONE

On 6 April 1944, First Lady of the United States Eleanor Roosevelt visited troops in the Panama Canal Zone. Her visit began with a tour of Army, Navy and civilian contractor personnel hospitals. She then went to a United Service Organizations dance, reading numbers for a prize draw in Spanish due to the high number of Puerto Rican troops in attendance. Roosevelt's trip culminated when she went to an orientation class for the Panama Mobile Force, giving new soldiers insight into the reasons for the war.

*Eleanor Roosevelt speaks with Corporal Franklin C Woggener, who is recovering from a leg injury at Gorgas Hospital*



## RED ARMY ROLLS INTO ROMANIA

The USSR's invasion of Romania began on 8 April, facing 300,000 troops from Romania and Germany. It started with the First Battle of Târgu Frumos when General Konev's 2nd Ukrainian Front advanced into the Târgu Frumos and Botosani regions. They quickly broke through Romanian 4th Army and 24th Panzer Division ranks, but were no match for Hasso von Manteuffel's elite Großdeutschland Panzergrenadier. Soon Târgu Frumos was retaken, the first of many setbacks during a three-month offensive. Soviet historians carefully erased this failure after the Soviet-German war and it has become one of many Red Army battles that have been all-but forgotten.

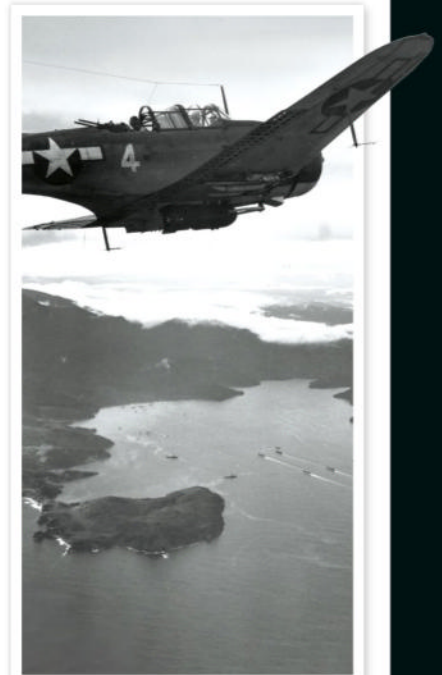


*A column of Romanian tanks heads to the front to challenge the advancing Red Army*

## BATTLE OF HOLLANDIA

During the New Guinea Campaign, US and Australian forces landed at Tanahmerah Bay and Humboldt Bay simultaneously with the invasion of Aitape. The operation was hugely successful, partly due to the destruction of Japanese aircraft in a surprise bombing attack. The Imperial Japanese Army was forced to withdraw and take up new defensive positions in the island's east. Allied forces kept up the momentum by quickly restoring the bombed Sentani plain airfields and mounting a strategic bombing campaign in Western New Guinea.

*Below: A Douglas SBD Dauntless, capable of carrying 2,250lb (1,020kg) of bombs, flies over Hollandia. Allied bombing of airfields on the Sentani plain destroyed 340 Japanese aircraft*





# REVIEWS

Our pick of the latest military history books

## KERSTEN'S LISTS A SAVIOUR IN THE DEPTHS OF HELL

THE REMARKABLE STORY OF HOW HIMMLER'S MASSEUR SAVED MANY THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE DURING WWII

**Author:** Francois Kersaudy

**Publisher:** Mountain Leopard

**Press Price** £25 (Hardback)

**Released:** Out now

Felix Kersten was an extraordinary character. A Baltic German by origin, with Finnish citizenship, he studied under a Chinese doctor in Berlin, somehow acquiring – or assuming – the title of professor of manual therapy. He certainly possessed a magic touch and by the 1930s had amassed a large fortune massaging the aristocracy and business elite of Northern Europe. Purchasing a fine feudal estate at Hartzwalde, near Berlin, he then began ministering to the Nazis: his clients included Joachim von Ribbentrop (the foreign minister) and Rudolf Hess (the deputy leader). Kersten's successful practice attracted the notice of SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler and his ability to relieve Himmler's excruciating

stomach cramps made him an indispensable therapist for the architect of the Holocaust. He used this influence to save the lives of concentration camp prisoners.

There is a resurgence of interest in Kersten's story. An account by Joseph Kessel, *The Man with the Miraculous Hands*, is now being made into a film, and it portrays the masseur as a brave humanitarian. Ian Buruma's recent *The Collaborators* strikes a different note, seeing him as a clever dissembler. Francois Kersaudy's lively, well-researched biography *Kersten's Lists* charts a course between these viewpoints. It is an intriguing read, plunging the reader into the dark heart of the Nazi regime.

Kersaudy shows us how Kersten quickly became a confidant of the SS leader. Capitalising on this, after relieving Himmler of his physical pain, he would present his patient with a list of people he wanted to be released from the concentration camps. The grateful Reichsführer usually complied. Kersten's mercy mission culminated in a dramatic

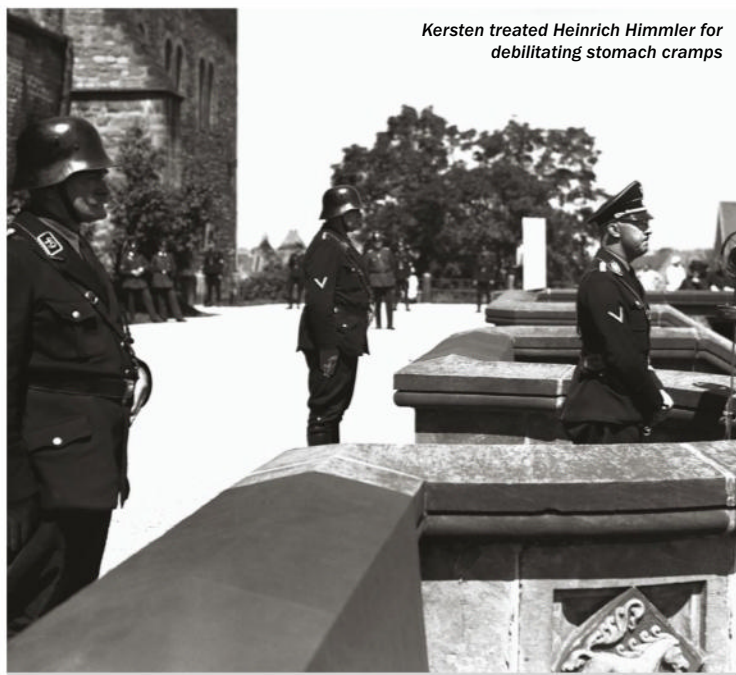
meeting at Hartzwalde on 20 April 1945, vividly recounted, where Himmler agreed to spare the lives of some 60,000 Jewish prisoners. This astonishing achievement led to a heartfelt tribute from the World Jewish Congress.

So far, so good. But Kersten's diary and memoir, reconstructed after the war, presents a bewildering mixture of fact and fantasy. In it, he took credit for dissuading Himmler from forcibly deporting the entire Dutch population to Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe. No such scheme ever existed. In reality, this self-styled captive of the Nazi regime led the life of a bon viveur. His estate at Hartzwalde became a luxurious fiefdom, exempt from Nazi labour and agricultural laws; within it, Kersten was one of the few men in the Reich able to freely make international phone calls. His nickname within Himmler's circle was *der dicke Buddha* – the fat Buddha.

While the masseur received handsome remuneration from other Nazi officials, he chose not to charge Himmler for treatment.



Felix Kersten: brave humanitarian with a shady side

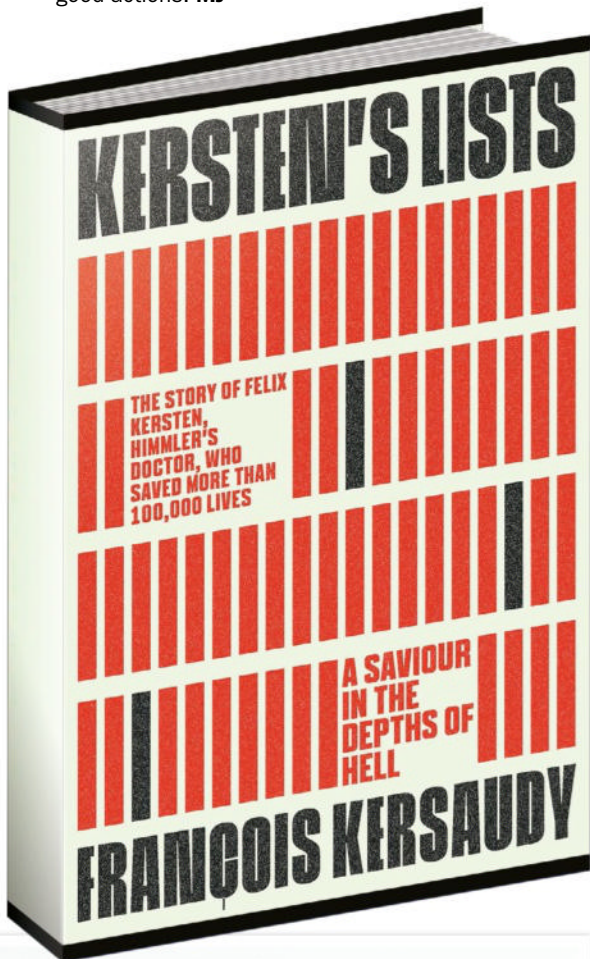


Kersten treated Heinrich Himmler for debilitating stomach cramps





The initial motive may have been greed rather than altruism. British Intelligence, alerted to Kersten's intercessions through eavesdropping on high-ranking German prisoners at Latimer House in Buckinghamshire, recorded he was charging heavily for inclusion on one of his lists. However, as the war drew to a close, he undoubtedly saved thousands of lives, at considerable risk to himself. Kersaudy's sympathetic biography reminds us that morally compromised individuals are still capable of good actions. **MJ**



*The Nazi leaders and top officials allowed Kersten to lead a luxurious lifestyle*



# 44 DAYS IN PRAGUE

## THE RUNCIMAN MISSION & THE RACE TO SAVE EUROPE

**Author:** Ann Shukman **Publisher:** Hurst

**Price:** £25 (Hardback) **Released:** 4 April 2024

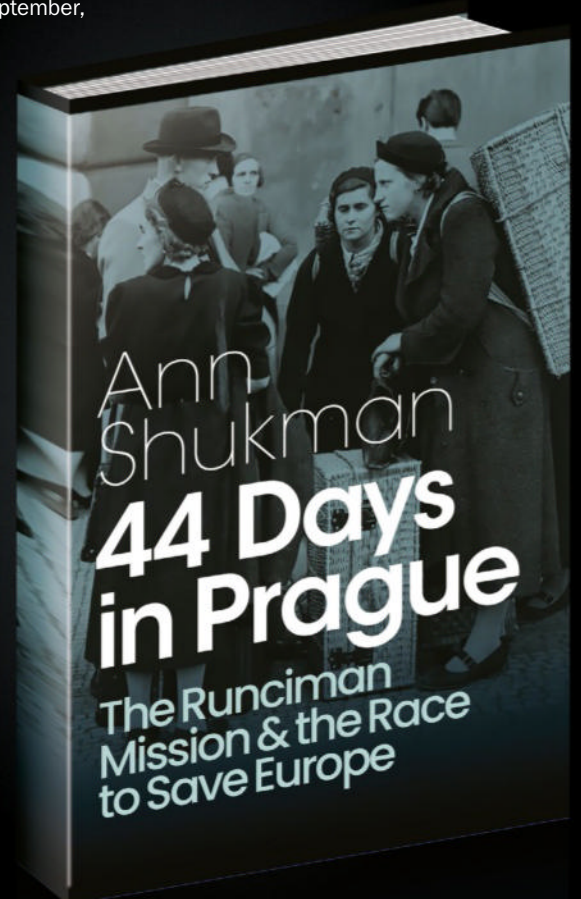
**HOW THIS BRITISH POLITICIAN'S 1938 TRIP TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND HIS ATTEMPTS TO AVERT WAR BECAME THE VICTIM OF A GRAVE HISTORICAL INJUSTICE**

In the summer of 1938 Walter Runciman was asked by the British government to undertake a near impossible mission. He was nearing the end of his political career and had little experience of international diplomacy and even less knowledge of Czechoslovakia. But with Hitler threatening armed invasion, his brief was to explore whether the rising tension between the Sudeten Germans and the Czech government could be resolved. He arrived in Prague on 3 August 1938 and left on 15 September, and his granddaughter Ann Shukman has produced a well-researched and highly readable account of those fateful forty-four days.

Shukman's narrative brings to life an array of diplomatic gatherings and social encounters. Runciman comes across as doing a good job in difficult circumstances. He has been criticised for being overly sympathetic to the Sudetens but, as Shukman reveals, the solution he was drafting favoured local autonomy over outright cession, with the frontiers of the Czech state, its defence lines and heavy industries kept largely intact.

However, Runciman's report was overshadowed by Neville Chamberlain's dramatic trip to see Hitler at the Berghof on 15 September (initiating the shuttle diplomacy that culminated in the Munich Agreement). Shukman

tells us that Chamberlain first asked Runciman to accompany him but then thought better of it. In a three-hour meeting with the Führer the British prime minister instead agreed to cede all areas of the Sudetenland with a 50 percent German population to the Reich, and the report was doctored in seeming support of this policy. Shukman's book tells a very different story and in doing so rights an historical injustice. **MJ**





# DOES COUNTER-TERRORISM WORK?

A TIMELY AND THOROUGH REASSESSMENT OF THE MODERN 'WAR ON TERROR'

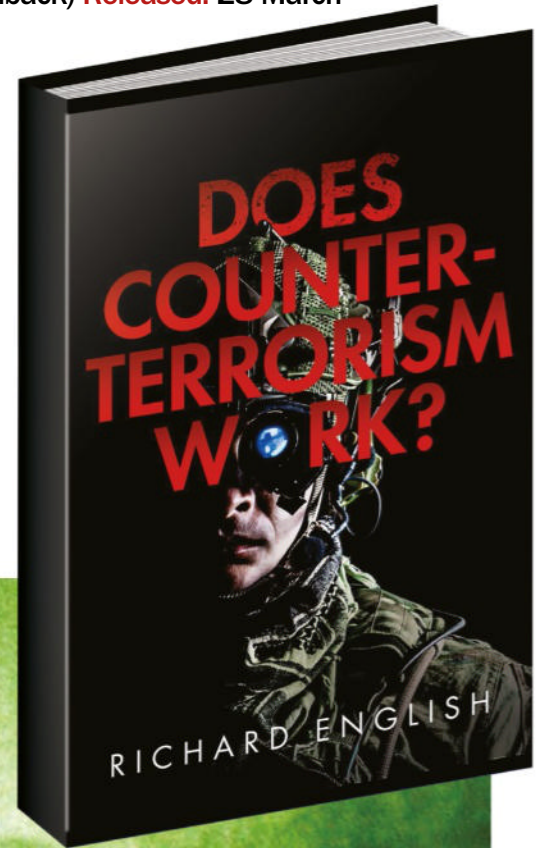
**Author:** Richard English **Publisher:** Oxford University Press **Price:** £25 (Hardback) **Released:** 28 March

Richard English of Belfast University is a respected terrorism expert and his latest study provides a companion to his 2016 volume *Does Terrorism Work?* While *Does Counter-Terrorism Work?* is well-researched, the staunchly academic approach may not be to everyone's tastes. Furthermore, he has a narrow focus and readers will be disappointed if they are expecting a comprehensive examination of counter-terrorism through the ages.

Divided into three, it covers post-9/11, Northern Ireland and Israel. By the author's own admission his main aim is to provoke debate as much as offer answers. He rightly points out that terrorism has done much to shape the modern world, as reflected in the security measures woven into our everyday lives. In a way this means terrorism has won – nor can it ever be completely neutralised.

It can be easily argued that counter-terrorism failed in at least two of the three areas examined in this book. In Afghanistan and Iraq it resulted in essentially failed states. In Israel's case, no matter how many wars it wins it remains a nation under siege thanks to the insoluble Palestinian issue, and the long sought-after accommodation with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation was swiftly stymied by Hamas. Although The Troubles in Northern Ireland were successfully brought to an end, the resulting political stalemate has not produced the dividends hoped for: the Republicans and Unionists remain as polarised as ever, but without the violence.

The author's definition of a successful counter-terrorism campaign is extremely broad. In his conclusions he generously sees some strategic successes, however, in the end when it comes to the answer he argues "a binary choice" is "persuasive". **ATJ**



US Special Forces in Afghanistan round up Taliban fighters, March 2004



**"IN AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ  
COUNTER-TERRORISM RESULTED  
IN ESSENTIALLY FAILED STATES"**



# THE DEADLY GAME

## A BRITISH ARMY SECRET AGENT HANDLER IN THE TROUBLES

A FASCINATING MEMOIR THAT SHEDS SOME MUCH-NEEDED LIGHT ON A HITHERTO MURKY WORLD

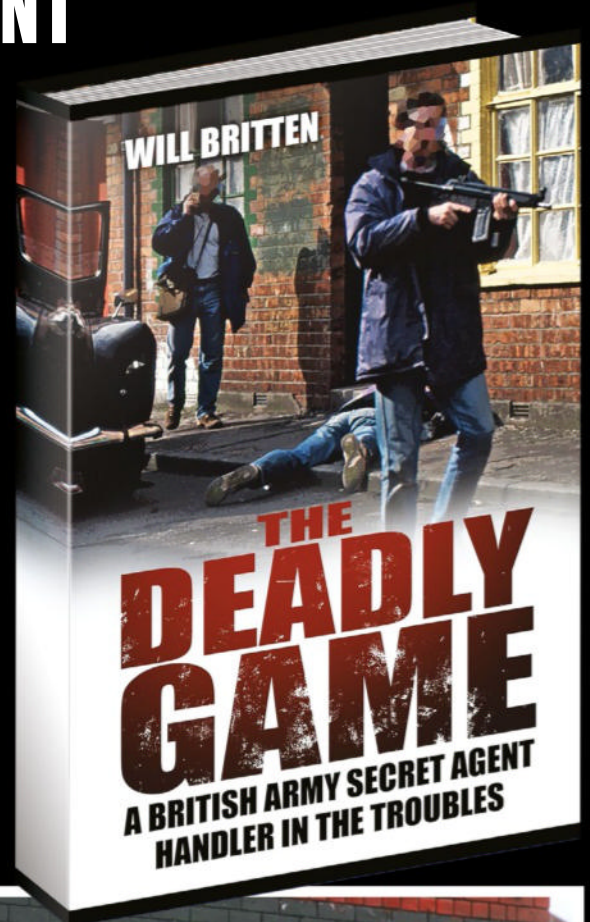
**Author:** Will Britten **Publisher:** The History Press

**Price:** £20 (Paperback) **Released:** 28 March

Britain's covert war against paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland during The Troubles is shrouded in mystery. With so many documents relating to it still classified, its history remains obscured by half-truths, rumours and bonkers conspiracy theories. This new book by a former British intelligence officer now seeks to redress that.

The author, writing under the pseudonym of Will Britten, tells us that he served in Northern Ireland with the British Army's Forces Research Unit (FRU). Set up in 1982, this was an undercover outfit tasked with stymying paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland, supposedly on both sides of the sectarian divide. In the early 2000s, however, FRU's secretive work came to the public's attention after the HM-Government-backed Stevens Inquiries accused it of colluding with Loyalist paramilitaries in criminal activity. Unsurprisingly, it's an allegation the author goes to some lengths to dispute, and his take on what happened suggests that FRU operations could be as complicated as they were shady.

Working with other British security services, the FRU's clandestine role was to infiltrate and investigate paramilitary factions. It did this by recruiting agents and informers from within these groups and from the neighbourhoods they came from. These so-called 'touts' had, according to Britten, a myriad of reasons for betraying their communities – he's also keen to point out the skill and guile required to turn them while offering insights into the strategies FRU used in getting them to defect. **NS**



During The Troubles in Northern Ireland 'touting' was slang for informing



Images: Getty



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N E X T M O N T H

'Sink the Bismarck!'

# CHURCHILL'S REVENGE

How the devastating loss of HMS Hood  
launched a mission across the Atlantic to  
destroy the jewel of the German Navy

**HISTORY  
WAR**

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# CRIMEAN WAR VC

One of the first Victoria Crosses awarded, to a young seaman who displayed incredible courage during the Battle of Inkerman

**K**een to reward the most extraordinary acts of valour during the Crimean War (1853-56), Queen Victoria introduced the Victoria Cross on 29 January 1856. One of its first recipients was Seaman James Gorman in an action that also saw his compatriots Thomas Reeves and Mark Scholefield awarded Victoria Crosses.

The medals had the following citation: "At the Battle of Inkerman, 5 November 1854, when the Right Lancaster Battery was attacked, these three seamen mounted the Banquette, and under a heavy fire made use of the disabled soldiers' muskets, which were loaded for them by others under the parapet. They are the survivors of five who performed the above action."

Auction house Noonans Mayfair sold Gorman's Victoria Cross at its Orders, Decorations, Medals and Militaria auction on 6 December 2023. It exceeded its estimated price of £200,000-260,000, fetching £320,000 from a private collector. Head of client liaison at Noonans, Christopher Mellor-Hill, explained why Gorman's Victoria Cross attracted such a high price: "The Naval version of the Victoria Cross is much rarer and at the time had a blue ribbon rather than the crimson ribbon now associated with all Victoria Crosses."

Just over eight years after his act of valour at Inkerman, at the age of 28 Gorman was



## NOONANS MAYFAIR

Established in 1990, Noonans has risen to be one of London's premier historical auction houses, selling over 25,000 lots a year. They offer free valuation on artefacts for sellers, and you can visit their website to discover upcoming auctions such as the legendary Frank Goon reference collection. Noonans also hold regular Orders, Decorations, Medals and Militaria auctions.

For more information visit [www.noonans.co.uk](http://www.noonans.co.uk)

discharged from the Royal Navy, having reached the rank of petty officer. However, he decided not to remain in Great Britain; instead, in 1862 he permanently relocated to New South Wales, a place he had previously visited with the Royal Navy. After a brief stint as a sailmaker, Gorman was recruited by the New South Wales government and served aboard NSS Vernan. There, he looked after young recruits, teaching them essential gunnery, cutlass and rifle skills.

Gorman died on Spectacle Island near Sydney on 15 October 1882, aged 48. He was one of the most respected officers on the Vernan as a Victoria Cross recipient and for the care he had shown to sick crew members during a scarlet fever outbreak. At Gorman's funeral, a firing party gave a naval salute from the boys he had cared for on the Vernan.

*Left: James Gorman's Victoria Cross with its characteristic blue ribbon. It was awarded for his valour at Inkerman, together with an annuity of £10*

*Below: James Gorman's portrait, displaying him in uniform with his medals including the Victoria Cross*



Images: Army, Noonans Mayfair

Foggy conditions forced troops like Gorman to fight on their own initiative, leading to Inkerman being dubbed 'The Soldier's Battle'. Four Navy Victoria Crosses were later awarded





ISSUE ONE  
2014

# HISTORY *of* WAR

THE STORIES, STRATEGIES & MACHINES

## AMERICA'S WAR *in the* PACIFIC

*Iwo Jima and  
the Philippines  
campaign*



### WAR MACHINES

- SOVIET T-34 TANK
- SNIPER RIFLES
- GALERA REAL

TOP  
SECRET

LETTERS FROM  
OPERATION  
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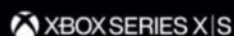


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